SPECIAL 2013 AWARDS ISSUE!

FAMOUS ROCK STAR GUITARS!

Guitar & Bass

THE BEST GUITARS AMPS & BASSES

GEAR OF THE YEAR Awards

Vintage Tales

The mystery and history of old instruments

Private Collection

From gypsy jazz guitars to rock'n'roll classics

Anthem PUBLISHING

DECEMBER 2013 Vol 25 No 03 £4.25

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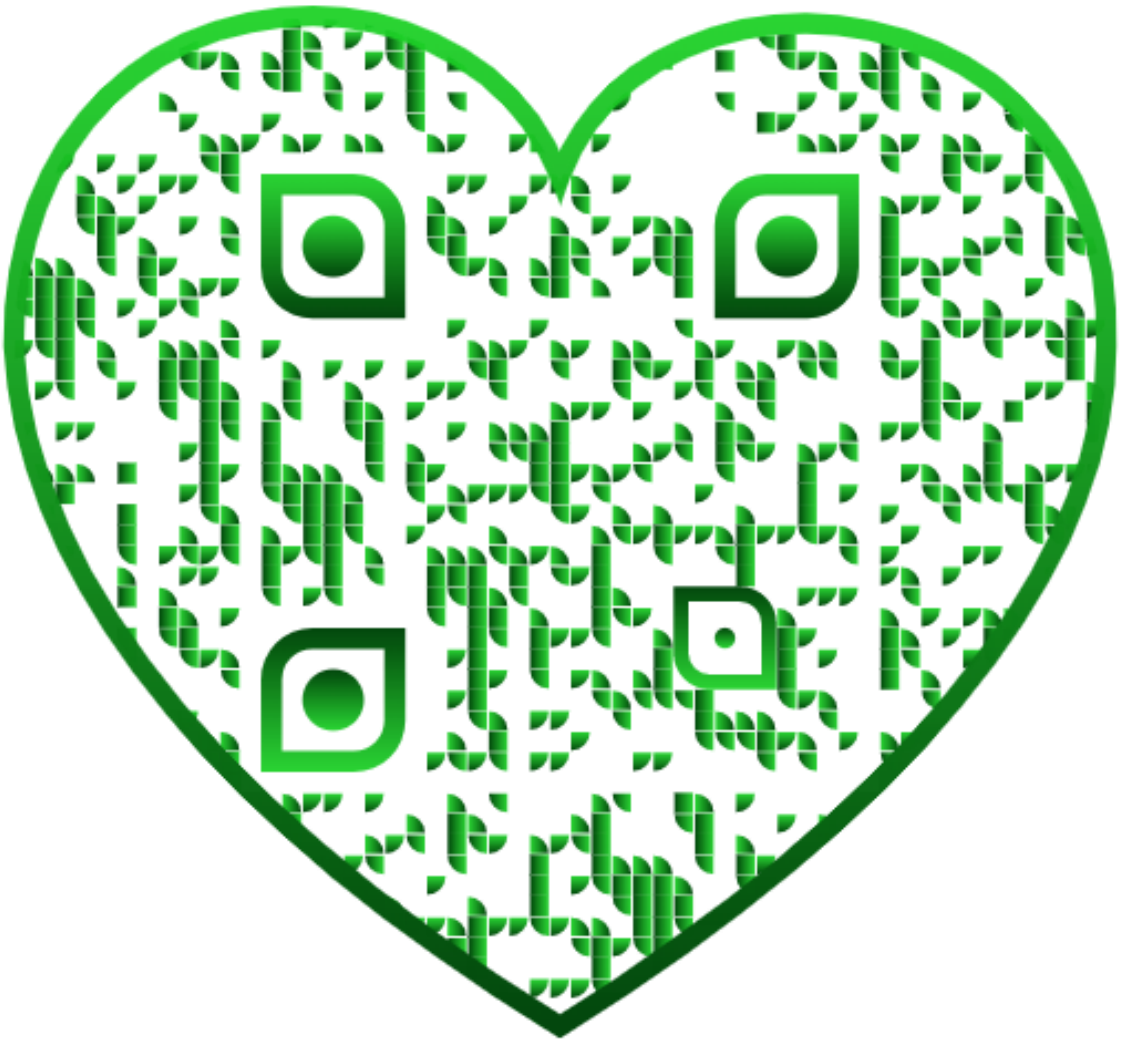

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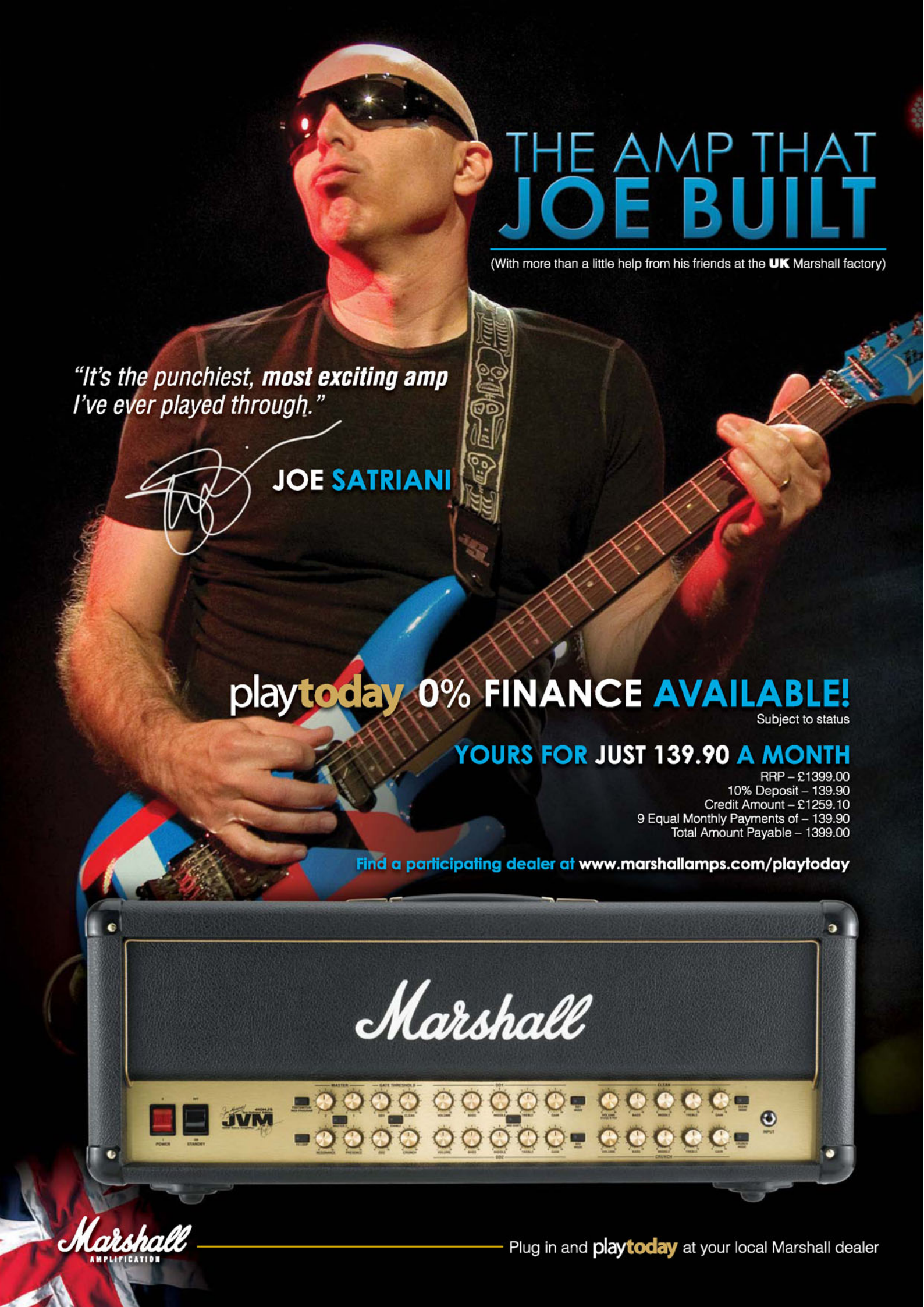
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Guitar & Bass

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Subscriptions & Back Issues **Guitar & Bass Magazine**
https://anthem.subscribeonline.co.uk
Tel **0844 322 1291 (UK)**
Tel: **Call Toll Free 800 428 3003 (US)**
Tel **+44 (0) 1795 414 781 (Rest of World)**
Email **guitarandbass@servicehelpline.co.uk**
Price (12 issues) **£51 (UK), £64 (Europe/Republic Of Ireland), $99 (USA), £72 (Rest of World)**
See page 104 for subscription details

Printed by Benham Goodhead Print
Tel +44 (0) 1869 363 333

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd, The Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street London SE1 0SU** Tel **+44 (0) 203 148 3000**

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A truly award-winning issue...

Where did that year go? It seems like only the other week we were arguing and fighting over... erm, we mean 'sensibly discussing' the contenders for the 2012 Gear Of The Year Awards. But having gone through all the guitars, amps and other assorted goodies, it looks as though it's been another fine year. The sheer amount of quality equipment released led to us facing plenty of hard choices, but – as always – we hope the gear we've selected as worthy of rosettes helps you make some great purchasing decisions.

And if checking out our Gear Of The Year selections doesn't provide you with enough eye candy, then have no fear; not only is there a bumper *Private Collection,* there's also a plethora of famous instruments in our *Rock Star Guitars* article to get your guitar-lovin' chops salivating. Enjoy the issue...

John

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Improve your playing using the 'pivot' method

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& a FREE Fender Mini Twin amp when you subscribe
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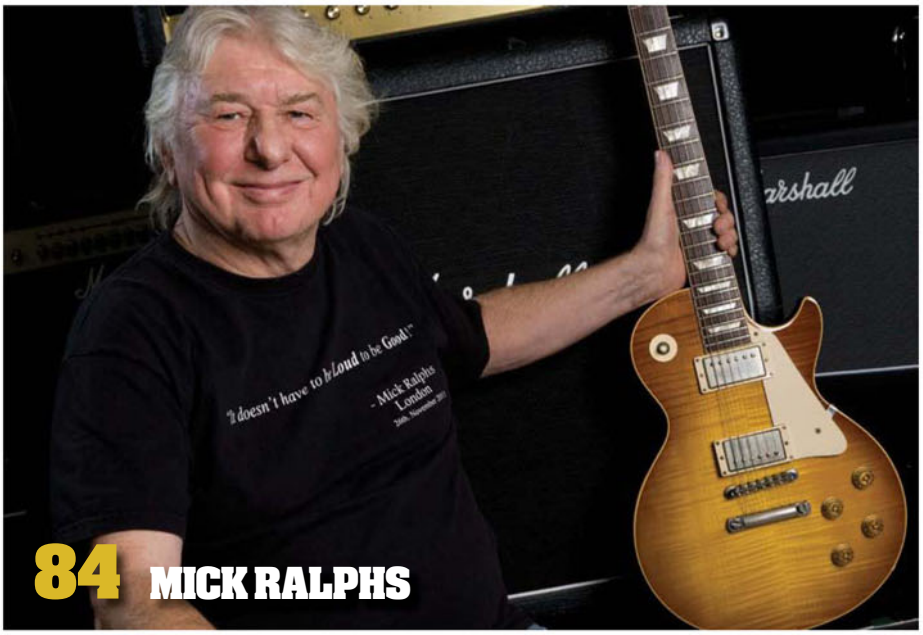

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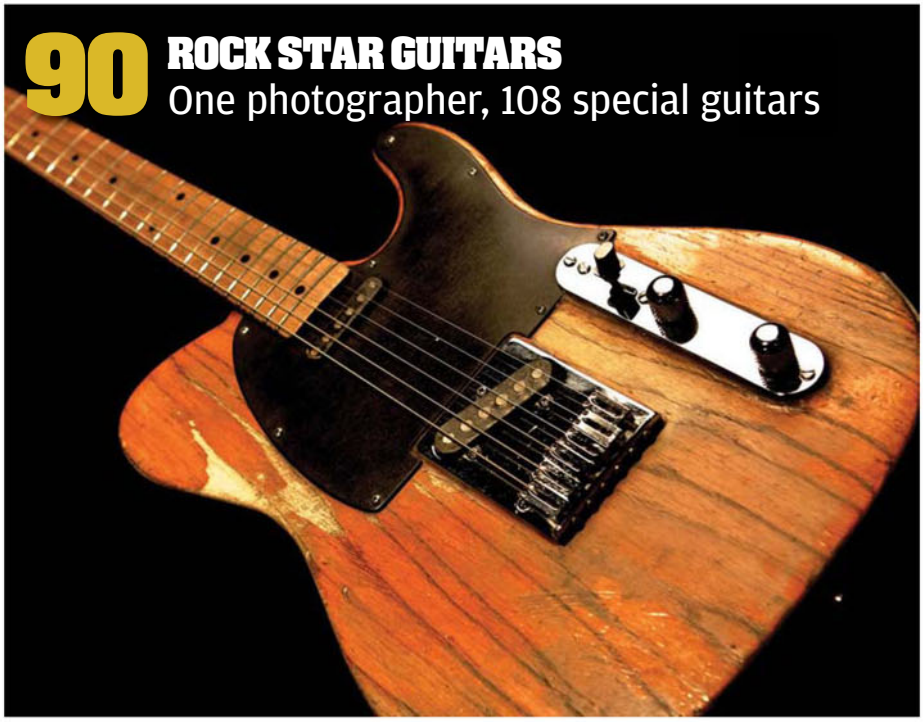

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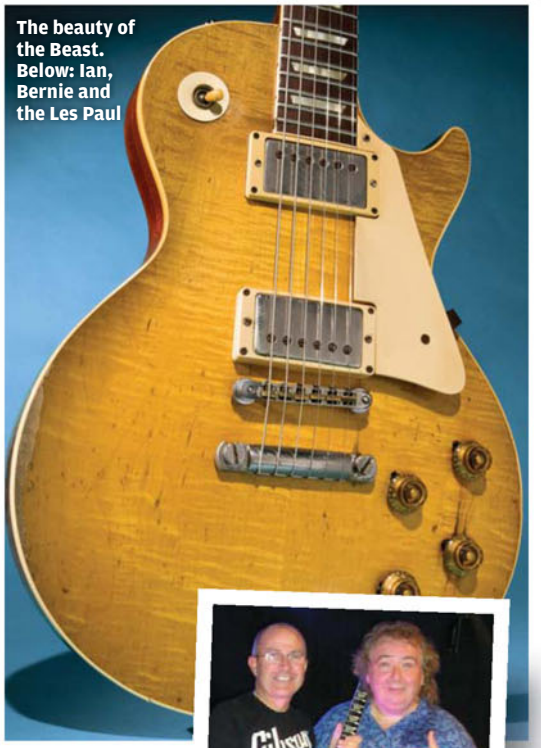
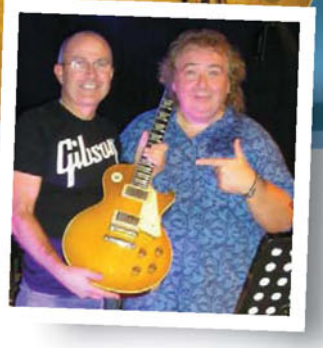
STAR LETTER

A WONDERFUL ACT OF CHARITY



The beauty of the Beast. Below: Ian, Bernie and the Les Paul



Just picked up the November issue to read about Bernie Marsden's Beast Les Paul, which made me smile as I'm the man who paid the £100 charity donation to get to see that special guitar. I have a love for old guitars and their history and I have watched Bernie on a number of occasions in the hope I would get to see the Beast, including a recent Friday night concert at the Radcliffe Centre in Buckingham. The Beast was sadly not present that night, and after the show I spoke with Bernie and asked how the Beast was. 'Safe and well,' Bernie replied. He then asked if I was down on the following night. I told him that I had no ticket, so I was heading back to Shropshire. Bernie replied, 'If you make it down, let me know, I'll get you in.' I thought this was a very genuine offer and left thinking what a lovely guy Bernie is.

Reflecting on the night's terrific music on the 125 mile drive home I arrived home thinking, why not take the opportunity to do a deal to see the Beast and benefit the charity Bernie was performing for? I slept very little and the following morning texted Bernie's fellow guitarist Jim Kirkpatrick (a terrific player who plays lead in FM as well as a number of other bands) asking Jim to get the following message to Bernie: 'If he brings the Beast out tonight I will donate £100 to the charity as a thank you!' The day progressed and in truth I had let the thought go, but, then, at 4.45pm in Shropshire, I got the following text: 'Bernie says, it's a done deal. Get yourself down here.'

At 4.55pm I was on the road, and at 7pm I was in Buckingham. I walked into the Radcliffe Centre at 7.30pm to see the Beast on a stand to the left of the stage. It is possibly the most beautiful, elegantly aged thing I have ever seen. I felt I knew this guitar well, I have watched many times the YouTube footage of Bernie playing *Dynaflow* on the Beast at Wild Wire Music in Selby – my favourite footage. It captures the guitar close up, Bernie's amazing playing and the instrument's incredible tone. Quite simply the perfect demonstration.

In the second half of the gig Bernie stopped the show, explained to the audience my offer and invited me up on stage to hold the Beast whilst he talked to the audience about it. It really was everything I had hoped for, Bernie could see my appreciation of the guitar and he just became more enthusiastic to share the stories, he really is a wonderful guy. After the show many, many people were looking closely at the Beast and taking pictures, which was funny because before the show she sat quietly to one side, fairly un-noticed. Maybe others have now been sucked in to this wonderful appreciation of this iconic instrument. I have also since visited Wild Wire Music in Selby to see where *Dynaflow* was filmed: a really nice shop, really nice guys and I left with a 1975 Stratocaster after sharing some Bernie stories!

Ian Bebb *via email*

Rosetti
Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your Fusion gig bag – electric, acoustic or bass available!

G&B **Delighted that your experience lived up to expectations. We can also vouch for Bernie being one of rock's true gentleman – he was incredibly helpful and patient with us when we were putting the cover feature together. From the feedback we've got from yourself and fellow *G&B* readers, there's a lot of well-earned love out there for both Bernie and the Beast, and long may it continue. Hats off also to Wild Wire Music for treating you right – we're sure that Strat suits you down to the ground.**

ALVIN LEE AND THE FENDER STRAT MYSTERY UPDATE

To whom it may concern; I just picked up a copy of your October 2013 issue. I recently went to visit my brother Bruce in Williamsport, PA for his 60th birthday. He saw Alvin Lee many times at the Fillmore East NYC, and we both were saddened by his passing. So we went on YouTube to pull up some videos, if memory serves me I typed in either *Help Me* or *I Can't Keep From Crying* and witnessed a performance with him playing this very show with the red Strat. We were amazed because we never saw him play anything but a Gibson 335 or 345. Check it out!

Robert Sisino *via email*

A LIFE-LONG GUITAR LESSON

I was interested to read last month's Star Letter, as I've likewise experienced the excruciating pain of losing a once-loved guitar to make room for a new one. I'll admit to having a love for all things Gibson when it comes to six strings, with Fender and Warwick getting the nod for bass; I'm a jobbing solo artist on the pub and club circuit and I've recently put a band together that should take off sometime soon. Subsequently, my gear tends to work for its keep, and there are very few 'ornaments' in the collection.

The one exception, however, is my Gibson Les Paul Standard, which I'd definitely run into a burning building to save if I had to. I have to admit that this is more of an indulgence than my other guitars as it's too beautiful and fragile to gig in the

places I play, where people dance and fall around far too closely for comfort.

The story of my finally getting my 'dream guitar' unfolds over several years, as I found it difficult justifying such a big spend to my long-suffering wife. I first fell in love with the Gibson Les Paul Standard while watching Peter Green play *Albatross* on *Top Of The Pops* all those years ago, but when I started playing my finances dictated that I opt for what I considered the next best thing (an Epiphone goldtop). The love I had for the Epi was sadly short-lived, and I soon sold it in order to buy a Gibson SG Special. Later on, the SG was loved and lost in favour of a Gibson Les Paul Studio.

Now I was getting close: this was a 'real' Les Paul and at last I was satisfied... or so I thought! After a few years I started giving the glad-eye to mag-ads, looking in shop windows longingly at the 'real deal' and scouring the internet for my longed-for possession. Eventually I found what I was looking for: I sold the Studio, the cat, a couple of the kids and the kitchen sink and just about scraped together enough to buy an immaculate used Gibson Les Paul Traditional. I was 56 years old at that point and I'd finally got one! I was in Heaven for about three weeks!!!

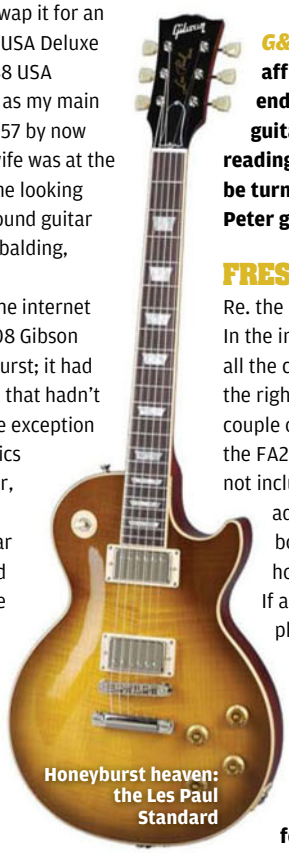
It still wasn't a Standard, though, and I didn't like the neck profile. I couldn't believe myself when I did a deal to swap it for an admittedly beautiful Fender USA Deluxe Strat to complement the 1988 USA Standard Strat I already had as my main gigging guitar. Here I was at 57 by now and Les Paul-less! My dear wife was at the end of her tether watching me looking at ads again and hanging around guitar shops like some overgrown, balding, wrinkly-faced kid.

I soon started searching the internet again and there it was, a 2008 Gibson Les Paul Standard in honeyburst; it had my name all over it. I sold all that hadn't been sold previously with the exception of my two Strats, two acoustics (one a Gibson), my Telecaster, my Epiphone Sheraton and my Shapelywood travel guitar and finally became the proud owner of what I believe is the best Les Paul ever built. The neck profile is fantastic, the chambered body makes it far more comfortable to hang around a 58-year-old's neck. In addition, the locking tuners, lead lock and other little niceties bring it bang up to date while maintaining the charm and beauty that is a Les Paul. This really is the 'dog's gonads' and it'll be with me when I'm summoned to the big gig in the sky.

The Freshman FA250GA and FA250GAC

The moral of the story is, if you want something badly enough go out and get it; don't compromise like I did, as it'll cost you a truckload more money and you'll never be satisfied until you've got exactly what you wanted in the first place.

Peter Price (aka Peter Lee) *via email*


Honeyburst heaven: the Les Paul Standard

G&B **Many thanks for sharing this life-affirming tale – and we're so glad that it ended up with you getting your dream guitar. If any film or TV executives are reading, this is the kind of story that should be turned into a script. Just make sure that Peter gets the credit, and the cash.**

FRESHMAN CORRECTION

Re. the Freshman review in the November issue. In the interests of ensuring that your readers have all the correct information, so that they can make the right choice for them, just wanted to correct a couple of errors in the text. The prices quoted for the FA250GA (£399) and the FA250GAC (£499) do not include the price of a case, as stated. In addition, both guitars do feature genuine bone nuts and saddles – not plastic ones. I hope this clears up any misunderstandings. If any of your readers have any queries, please contact us through www.freshmanguitars.net.

Sean Kelly
Owner/Designer, Freshman Guitars

G&B **Many thanks for taking the time and trouble, Sean, and apologies to all for the errors.**

Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

Show Of Brands

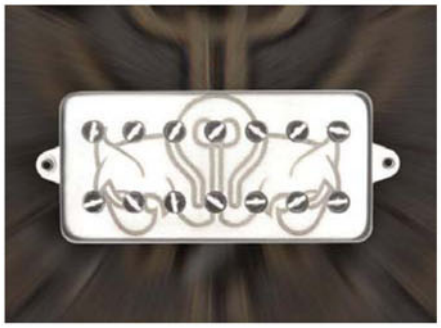
The world's finest guitar museum is due to open its doors in February next year with an awe-inspiring vintage collection

The Swedish town of Umea is soon to become a primary global destination for vintage guitar fans everywhere when *Guitars: The Museum* stages its grand opening in February next year.

The university town in Northern Sweden is 2014's European Capital Of Culture and will soon house the private collection of twin brothers Samuel and Michael Åhdén, likely the finest assemblage of its kind anywhere in the world. Forty years of collecting have brought together a highly valuable treasure trove that includes over 500 six-string rarities, amongst them a 1954 Fender Stratocaster, a 1950 Fender Broadcaster, a 1960 Gibson Les Paul sunburst, a Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster, a 1959 korina Gibson Flying V, 1965 Gibson Firebird and a 1953 Mosrite Joe Maphis signature doubleneck.

'There is no guitar museum of this kind anywhere,' says Anna Olofsson, marketing manager of Umea. 'Being able to show off the collection is absolutely fantastic. The guitars are important elements in a culture that is shared by so many. In a peerless fashion, they speak of contemporary history and are very much in tune with Umea's local music scene.'

The collection will be showcased over four floors, and with 3000 square metres of floor space the venue will also include a live music stage, a music shop styled like an old American pawnshop, and a restaurant - and they're hoping for 30,000 visitors per year. See www.guitarsthemuseum.com for a video interview with the brothers Åhdén.



Built Like A Truck

Bare Knuckle add to their signature pickup range with the addition of the Misha Mansoor Juggernaut humbuckers, the perfect match for metal guitarists after an upgraded sound. Mansoor knows a thing or two about sound, so these could well be a fine option; aside from his day job as Periphery's prog metal axeman he spends a fair amount of time on the other side of the desk and has worked with Animals As Leaders, amongst other acts. With symmetrically hand-wound twin screw coils and a combo of Alnico V and ceramic VIII magnets, these new humbuckers should provide the dynamics, tightness and attack needed for heavier sounds. Lookswise, the intricate 'Bulb' cover etching is optional and there are numerous coloured bobbins options if you want to dispense with the cover. Six- and seven-string models are available. See www.bareknucklepickups.co.uk for more.

RUN THE GAUNTLET

Electro-Harmonix has seen fit to introduce another distortion/overdrive pedal to the fray, and the OD Glove offers a wide field of distortion options and an impressive dynamic range. This compact unit promises rich overtones thanks to special semi-conductors that do the clipping, and tones include everything from clean boost for emulating blues heroes through to Brit tube amps and full high-gain saturation for heavy riffing. A 'Feel' switch toggles between tube power amp sonics and a tighter tone, while the 'Tone Shift' adds further options. The OD Glove features true bypass. For all the specs and to see a demo video, head to www.ehx.com.

In Their Element

Two new multi-FX units arrive from Digitech this month, the Element and Element XP. The Element has 100 presets on the menu including 32 effects (the XP has 38), 12 amps, nine cab options and 45 drum tracks, all of which can be customised for a personal touch. Effects include versions of classic overdrive and distortion pedals like Ibanez's TS-9 Tubescreamer, Boss' DS-1 Distortion and EHX's hefty Big Muff Pi, and there's a fine choice of top amp models too with takes on the Fender tweed Deluxe, Vox AC30, Marshall JCM100 and Mesa Boogie's iconic Dual Rectifier. Both units feature an onboard tuner and headphone input and the XP has an expression pedal for famous wah-wah recreations and real-time control. More over at www.digitech.com.

GIBSON M-III

Gibson revisits the archives with the M-III, a shred-friendly rocker from the 1990s

The double cutaway M-III may be somewhat of an unlikely re-release from Gibson, but back in its '90s heyday it was well received by those who enjoyed the odd flurry of speedy fretwork. The newly revived M-III features a mahogany body, a glued-in slim-taper neck perfect for fast fretting, and high gain Dirty Fingers humbuckers plus a central single coil, ideal for powering up a full hard rock arsenal. Add a five-way selector and push/pull coil splitting and there's a sizeable palette of tones at the fingertips. A Floyd Rose vibrato provides added zeal from shimmer to divebomb and there's some suitably extrovert finish choices including Cosmic Cobalt, Electric Lime, Vibrant Red and Orange Glow that will ensure the spotlight knows where to point. The reverse Explorer-style headstock completes the hair metal look. Sweep-pick over to www.gibson.com for all the finer details.

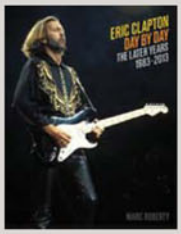
Silver Sounds

Fender has expanded its Vintage Modified range of amplifiers with three new '68 Custom models inspired by the classic late-'60s 'silverface' sound but with a look taken from their '68 models that boasts silver and turquoise front panels and aluminium 'drip-edge' grille cloths. The 2x12" '68 Custom Twin Reverb and lightweight 1x12" '68 Custom Deluxe Reverb both feature two channels, 'Custom' and 'Vintage'; the 'Custom' channel is newly equipped with a modified Bassman tone stack to better deal with the modern love of pedals. Celestion 12" G12V-70 speakers ensure plenty of headroom. Lastly comes the baby of the trio, the 12W '68 Custom Princeton Reverb, with modified all-valve tone circuitry and one lone Celestion TEN 30 speaker. All the new '68 Custom amplifiers feature tube-driven spring reverb and tremolo, reduced negative feedback for a better feel, and quicker overdrive onset to get down to business. Check out their online demo at www.fender.com.

NEWS IN BRIEF

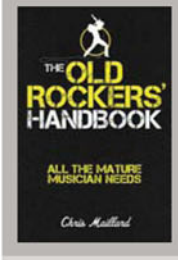
Clapton Update

Following on from his excellent first volume covering Eric Clapton's early career, Marc Roberty continues to chart Slowhand's musical journey and brings us up to date with *Eric Clapton Day By Day: The Later Years 1983–2013*. This tome covers everything from Clapton's comeback after drug and alcohol issues and shows including Live Aid, the Cream reunion and the Crossroads Festival through to studio sessions, tours, set lists and unreleased songs. A must-read for fans: www.halleonardbooks.com



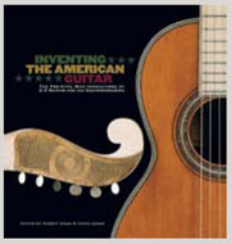
Stairlift To Heaven

Haynes unleash *Stairlift To Heaven – The Perfect Guide For Middle Aged Rockers* this month, an useful and amusing guide for the somewhat annuated who may still be harbouring delusions of musical grandeur. Here, musician and journalist Chris Maillard offers tips on which gear to choose, song choice, appropriate stagewear and general practical advice for musos who are getting a little long in the tooth. Rick Wakeman adds a foreword too; www.haynes.co.uk



History Repeated

Those wishing to brush up on their guitar history should invest in a copy of Hal Leonard's latest release, *Inventing The American Guitar*. The book coincides with CF Martin & Co's 180th anniversary and lays out the early history of American flat-top guitar design, focussing on Martin. Expect essays from expert writers, a stock of superb colour photos, fold-out schematic drawings, profiles on important models and a whole lot more. A fascinating read: see www.halleonardbooks.com



Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

Carlisle International Blues Rock Festival

8-10 NOVEMBER

A top blues event that includes Ian Siegal & the Mississippi Mudbloods, Bernard Allison, Royal Southern Brotherhood, John Amor, Stevie Nimmo Trio, The Stumble, Steve Roux and many more

WHERE? **Swallow Hilltop Hotel, Carlisle**
TICKETS **£30-45 (day); £98 (weekend)**
CONTACT **www.carlislebluesfestival.com**

Tenby Blues Festival

8-10 NOVEMBER

Blues enthbusiasts in Tenby have put together a fine bill for this upcoming shindig. The line up features Bernard Allison, Blues Train and Big Mamma's Door and there's jam sessions and 'blues education' on the programme too

WHERE? **Venues throughout Tenby**
TICKETS **£60 (weekend)**
CONTACT **www.tenbyblues.co.uk**

Great British Rock and Blues Festival

24-27 JANUARY

Head over to Butlins Skegness for a weekend to remember with Jefferson Starship, Carl Palmer, Dr Feelgood, the Yardbirds, the Animals and more

WHERE? **Butlins Skegness**
TICKETS **From £85**
CONTACT **www.bigweekends.com**

Great British Guitar Show

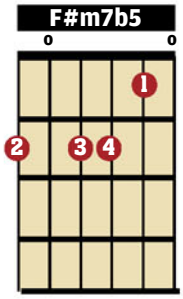
1-2 MARCH 2014

This unmissable Midlands show features a wide range of exhibitors, seminars, artist appearances and product demonstrations. As well as the huge exhibition of guitars and guitar-related gear there's a live stage with performances from Hayden Hewitt, John Verity and Bare Knuckle Blues Band

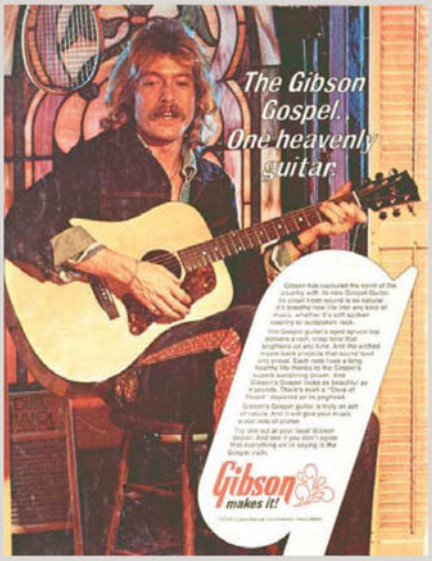
WHERE? **New Bingley Hall, Birmingham**
TICKETS **£12 (adv.)**
CONTACT **www.ukguitarshows.co.uk**

The Lost Chord

The Beach Boys' Brian Wilson is never one to shy away from a few strange chords here and there, and this diminished chord with a minor 7 was used for *Don't Talk Put Your Head On My Shoulder* from the classic *Pet Sounds* album. Of the several voicings, this one is easy to play and is a fine choice to add tension to the end of a phrase



WE'VE BEEN AD...



LORD ABOVE!

Far be it for us mere mortals to question the movements of the great bearded one in the sky, but we're almost certain that his anointed representatives would not have chosen to look like Benny and Bjorn's half-cut vagrant cousin (were he dangerously fixated with Magnum PI) had they come down from heaven's pearly gates to preach the good word. The pictured guitar, on the other hand, may well have been fit for such holy ventures. The Gibson Gospel was unleashed in the 1970s and although clearly aimed at a niche (yet godly) audience, it wasn't half bad. It featured a novel arched back that gave it a bigger voice, rendering it fit for a typical preacher's manifesto, and it was later reissued. Why there's a tennis racquet (what else could it be?) in the top left hand corner, we will never know... but he *does* move in mysterious ways, after all.

VINTAGE HOT ROD SERIES REVS UP

Fender has updated its Vintage Hot Rod Series with six new models that mix classic style with welcome modern touches

Fender is introducing four new guitars and two new basses to its Vintage Hot Rod Series this month, each with updated specs to suit the modern picker including various new pickup configurations, newfangled switching and comfort-friendly necks.

The ash-bodied Hot Rod '50s Telecaster has a maple neck with a D-shaped profile, and various tonal options are available via the Wide Range Special humbucker at the neck and single-coil Broadcaster pickup at the bridge. The '60s Telecaster follows similar neck specs but features a versatile three-pickup combo made up of a Twisted Tele neck pickup, a Texas Special Stratocaster middle pickup and a Broadcaster single-coil at the bridge, all controlled by a five-way switch.

Two new Stratocasters include a '50s-style maple-neck model with an ash body and an interesting mixture of pickups – an American Vintage single-coil '59 Stratocaster at the neck, a '56 Strat in the middle and a Texas Special single-coil at the bridge – and a '60s model with a mid-'60s C-shaped neck with rosewood fingerboard and another mix-and-match pickup selection, an American Vintage single-coil '59 Stratocaster (neck), '65 gray-bottom Stratocaster (middle) and single-coil '56 Stratocaster (bridge). Lastly there's a '60s Precision with a P/J pickup array and a '70s Jazz Bass with an alder body, a U-shaped maple neck, block markers and a compound-radius rosewood fingerboard... and, unusually, P/J pickups too. Various tasty finishes are available; see www.fender.com to make up your mind.

Take Aim

With a decent allowance of ironmongery and a timeless look, we love the look of Eastwood's new Marksman 5. This suave new offering is a tribute to the super-rare 1957 Magnatone Mark V, drawn up by the legendary Paul Bigsby. While this debonair new six-string replicates Bigsby's design in spirit, Eastwood has added a few modern improvements. Features include a lightweight tone-chambered mahogany body with a vintage sunburst finish, a 22-fret set mahogany neck with rosewood fretboard, a roller bridge with Bigsby tremolo, and custom-designed EW Alnico SCP90 pickups with a three-way switch for a nice tonal spread. Not only is this new Eastwood Marksman 5 a thing of beauty, but it will deliver bright and glassy tones that take on a new dimension when distortion is added. See www.eastwoodguitars.com.

Back To The Source

Award-winning effects manufacturer Source Audio has added the Soundblox 2 OFD Guitar microModeler and OFD Bass microModeler to their range. OFD stands for Overdrive, Fuzz, and Distortion, and these pedals feature a dozen tones aimed at both guitar and bass that include carefully-crafted models of Marshall and Mesa Boogie amps and classic pedal sounds including Electro-Harmonix's Big Muff, Dunlop's Fuzz Face and the timeless Ibanez Tube Screamer. These compact new pedals have tweakable internal noise gates, Treble, Mid and Bass controls, a durable cast-aluminum chassis, true bypass and a canny effects morphing function that can be accessed via an expression pedal or with SA's own Hot Hand 3 effects controller. The bass unit has a clean/dirty knob to blend the perfect tone and a Lo-Retain function to ensure rib-shaking bottom-end too. Check out the versatility of these two stompboxes on demo videos at www.sourceaudio.net.

Introducing

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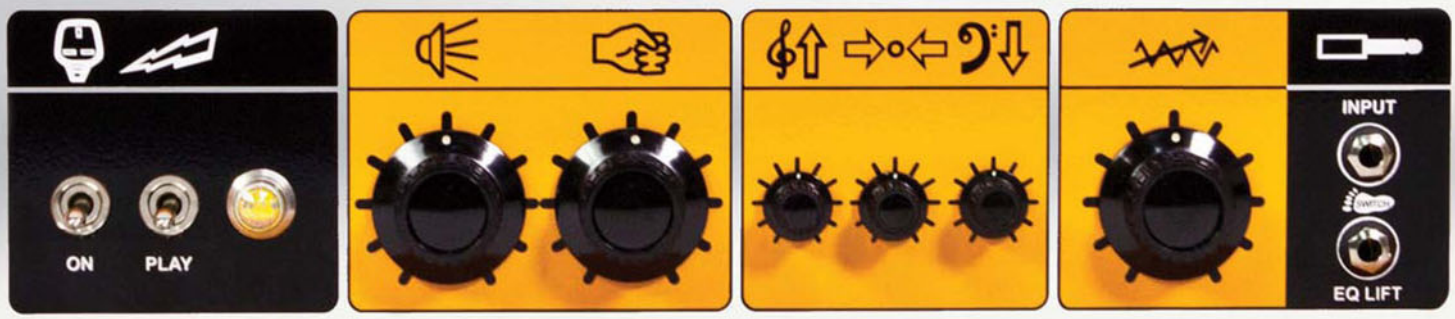
Guitar Awards 2013

Custom Shop 50



ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

orangeamps.com

follow us:

SOUND OF VICTORY

We first got word of fledgling British amp manufacturers Victory Amps when Guthrie Govan took their prototypes out on tour with him, and now the company has officially launched its first three models, and has added Rob Chapman and Glenn Proudfoot to its list of endorsees. The new range of handwired valve amps has been designed by ex-Cornford amp guru Martin Kidd and include the easily-portable V10 The Baron 10W 1x12" combo, for blues and rock tones; the V50 The Earl 50W two-channel head, offering versatile clean, crunch and lead tones; and the super-powerful V100 The Duke 100W two-channel head, with six footswitchable options that make it ideal for professional live and studio work (matching 2x12" and 4x12" cabinets fitted with Celestion V30 speakers are available, too). We love the regal looks, and after hearing the online demos we can't wait to get our hands on one. Take a look for yourself at www.victoryamps.com.

Northern Lights

Eleven years in, Northern Guitars' ever-popular Merseyside show returns once again to the Aintree Racecourse Exhibition Centre on Sunday 24 November. When it come to regional guitar shows this is one of the best, with four floors dedicated to guitars, basses and accessories. Expect to see over 80 exhibitors, collectors and dealers showing off their wares with the opportunity to buy, sell and trade everything guitar-related. There will be the usual array of new, secondhand and vintage gear on offer as well as some excellent Christmas bargains; there's a fine bill of live music too, with performances from ex-Argent frontman John Verity, local heroes the Amazing Kappa Band, rock and blues lovers the Andy Bennett Band and swing guitar guru Anthony Purdy. Add workshops and gear demos and it looks set to be an unmissable day out. Visit www.guitarshows.co.uk for all the info; info@guitarshows.co.uk; 01925 813185.

SIGNATURE DUO

Gibson looks to the stars with a new pair of artist guitars that are like chalk and cheese

Gibson has unleashed two signature crowd-pleasers in time for Christmas. First up, yet another Slash-endorsed model for our delectation, the Slash Signature Vermillion Les Paul. Only the best will do here, and the guitar's features follow Slash's exacting standards: carved solid grade AAA flamed maple top, weight-relieved select mahogany back, quarter-sawn mahogany neck with '60 slim taper profile, and a rosewood fretboard. Rich tone comes from his usual PAF-inspired Seymour Duncan signature pickups, but with this latest model it's all about the sumptuous new nitrocellulose Vermillion red finish.

At the other end of the scale comes the Zakk Wylde Moderne Of Doom, available in an ultra-limited run of only 250. The quirky design takes its lead from the hallowed Gibson Moderne, an unreleased rarity that was designed at the same time as the Flying V and Explorer in the '50s. Although prototypes of this holy grail of Gibsons are rumoured to exist, it didn't see the light of day until a reissue appeared in the early '80s. The Moderne Of Doom is built from solid mahogany and has a Grade-A maple top with black graphic and maple neck with dark Richlite fingerboard. When it comes to tone, it guarantees rock valhalla with Wylde's signature EMG active humbucker combo – an EMG85 at the neck and an EMG81 at the bridge – and there's a Floyd Rose for Wylde-inspired divebomb action. All the specs at www.gibson.com.

Bogner Birthday

Amp-building genius Reinhold Bogner toasts the 25th anniversary of his brainchild, Bogner Amplification, with the introduction of two new Helios amplifiers. These stunning amps feature handwired turret board construction, two footswitchable channels and a footswitchable effects loop/boost and are available in 50W or hefty 100W versions, both with EL34 tubes. 'After countless requests Reinhold Bogner revisited his vast amount of detailed notes that go back in time from three decades of archiving, modifying and designing amplifiers,' says a statement on their website. 'Through this treasure of documents lives the aural mojo of clients such as Eddie Van Halen, Steve Stevens, Jerry Cantrell, George Lynch, Michael Landau and others.' With this heady list of supporters, Bogner's reputation in the industry remains second to none. Aesthetics are important too for these celebratory models, and the control panels add an quirky design edge. See www.bogneramplification.com.

MOOG MINIS

We can always rely on Moog for high-quality effects, but let's face facts – we love the pedals, but they invariably cost a pretty penny. This month Moog addresses this issue with the release of the Minimooger range of five affordable analogue stompboxes. The range includes the MF Boost, which lets players switch between an 'articulate VCA' signal path and a 'coloured OTA' signal path for boutique amp sounds; the MF Drive, equipped with Moog's classic Ladder Filter as well as special FET amplifiers and OTAs in its drive section for a full range of dynamics; the MF Ring, based on the superb Moogerfooger MF-102; the MF Delay, with 35mS-700mS of delay time; and the MF Trem, which offers optical and hard tremolo, rotary effects and more. All the units have a fully analogue signal path, true bypass and come housed in a sleek black cast aluminium housing, plus an expression pedal input is provided for further experimentation. We feel that with this hand-assembled range, Moog is onto a winner. See more at www.moogmusic.com.

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Album reviews

Motörhead
AFTERSHOCK
UDR

There's a reason why Motörhead are always compared to speeding modes of transport, and steamrolling rock'n'roll cuts like *Heartbreaker*, *Death Machine*, *Going To Mexico* and *Paralysed* hit home harder than ever. *Lost Woman Blues* and the silky *Dust And Glass* temper the onslaught and plenty of calculous groove (*Silence When You Speak To Me* is supreme) glue this latest reinvigorated statement together.

Michael Lee Firkins
YEP
Magna Carta

Uncomplicated tunes play off thrifty slide work here and it all conjoins to stir up a solid, if a little formulaic, blues-roots record. The classic tinge of *Golden Oldie Jam* raises the flag and Firkins sticks firmly to the plan until *The Cane* shuts up shop with a vibesome bite missing thus far. There's absolutely nothing radical here; some may even find it a wee bit flyaway, but lovers of Americana should give it a try.

Nick Lowe
QUALITY STREET
Proper

Billed as 'A Seasonal Selection For All The Family' (and with an excellent globe-embracing cover) this musical box of chocolates treads boldly into the fearful lands of Christmas album territory. That said, this is really quite good. With hymns, lesser-known tunes and originals, song choices are the right side of the chimney and Lowe's mastery of subtle, warm-voiced lustre will serve any yuletide formidably.

Michael Schenker
BRIDGE THE GAP
in-akustik

Epic, skybound melodic rock with prog leanings thanks to lyrics that sound as if they were skilfully feathered by a guitar-loving druid in a break from 'henge duties. There's elements of Maiden with less grit'n'gallop, a healthy serving of Schenker's rounded guitar heroics and plenty of pounding rhythm work to keep it all seaworthy. Solid riffs meet oceanic, offset arrangements, and Schenker's vocals proudly ride the wave.

The Magic Band
PLAYS THE MUSIC OF CAPTAIN BEEFHEART - LIVE IN LONDON
Proper

Gentlemanly bows must be served to the cast that aided Don Van Vliet evoke his cuckoo world of idiosyncratic R&B imaginings. With tub-thumping vocalist John 'Drumbo' French serving up a fine Beefheart grumble, The Magic Band deliver live renditions of various CB creations and remind us that the world is short of artists willing to tear the world asunder to express being alive.

Nicolas Meier Trio
KISMET
MPG

Holed up in the UK, Meier has a fair few musical tricks stored up in his native Swiss bank account. From exquisitely-fashioned acoustic nylon flutters to pure jazz guitar, *Kismet* is a wondrous affair, bolstered by fine accompaniment. Coltrane's *Giant Steps* is majestically rebuilt, Cenk Erdogan's fretless adds an eastern thrill to the title track, strings enhance Meier's *Reflections* and Django Reinhardt's *Nuages* is sweetly reborn.

Boston
LIFE, LOVE AND HOPE
Frontiers

It's been over a decade since Tom Scholz and his hirsute comrades stepped up to the plate and we're stoked to welcome their epic, spiring soft-rock back to the stereo. Spacious melodies, polished guitar sounds, pad synths and trademark production values keep them firmly in the era from whence they came, but the infectious melodies and rock hooks are here in abundance. Boston: The Return.

Rev Ferriday & The Longdogs
NINE BEATS
Self Release

From indie accolades via the *NME* and John Peel while in '80s band Loop to a complete overhaul and a rebirth as a gritty lowdown bluesman, Ferriday has proven himself a many-faceted British talent. This month his trio tends to the fire with a second shadowy assortment of squawking, slide-driven fare that ain't half bad. Primal, uncluttered rockin' blues that built its porch in Blighty.

Richard Durrant
CHRISTMAS GUITARS
Long Man

Another festive gift this month comes from world class concert guitarist Richard Durrant who has put a mix of traditional and original fare under his tree. Ageworn folk, a carol or two and some more modern pickings are married via an ensemble of various instruments for an all-embracing winter tapestry. Whether pure instrumental or paired with Amy Kakoura's soothing tones, it's a tasteful celebration.

SNAP JUDGEMENTS

Wooden Horse
THIS KIND OF TROUBLE
Self-Release
Janice Long-endorsed duo strum out a soothing jumble of blues, folk, bluegrass and Americana; no fuss but plenty of soulful, tender vibrations

Tony Grey
ELEVATION
Abstract Logix
Modern jazz with effortlessly skilled execution and laidback virtuosity – this is sublime and moving stuff. No overplaying, just enough

Rob Tognoni
CASINO PLACEBO
Blues Boulevard
Gritty Aussie blues rock from the Tasmanian torchbearer. Hard rockin' and mighty expressive, this is chock full of riffing finery and fresh songs to match

BJ Cole
THE NEW HOVERING DOG
New Hovering Dog
Deeply unusual and as exhilarating as it was on its release in '73, this re-release reminds us how unique Cole really is. All at once, vivid, convivial and murky

Ron Sayer Jr & Charlotte Joyce
HARD TO PLEASE
Ron Sayer Jr & Charlotte Joyce
Chunky, straight-up Telecaster-led rocking blues and two voices that marry well. Maybe too clean-cut for some, but ideal for others

Joanne Shaw Taylor
SONGS FROM THE ROAD
Ruf
JST answers the fans' call with this assured live double CD/DVD. Fine-fingered licks, a killer band and all the faves from three LPs

Faith FKM - Naked Mercury:
"..there is presence and poke and an irrepressible sustain blended within this mixture of bold bass and snappy top end."
- Acoustic Magazine Apr 2013

Faith FV - Natural Venus:
"Awarded (joint) Best Guitar under £1000." - ***Editors Choice***
- Acoustic Magazine Dec 2012

Faith FECV - Eclipse Venus:
"The all-solid Eclipse Venus offers a full, bright tone capable of handling a range of disciplines." ***Guitarist Choice Award***
- Guitarist Magazine Apr 2012

Faith FV - Natural Venus:
"It's better put together and better equipped than others in its price bracket and very handsome." ***5 out of 5***
- Acoustic Magazine March 2012.

Faith FVHG-HEX - HiGloss Venus HEX:
"...the Venus is a very impressive instrument. There are few rivals to this extraordinary guitar."
- iGuitar Magazine - Issue 9, Oct 2012

Faith FS - Natural Saturn:
"There's a reassuring precision to the build quality.. and the sound quality is right on the money" - ***89% Score***
- Guitar & Bass Mag Feb 2012

Faith FN - Natural Neptune:
"Ah yes, the tone. As you'd expect, this is where we find our winner."
Best Buy Award
- Total Guitar 'Best Buy'. Dec 2012

Faith FRMG - Mahogany Mars:
"I tried fingerstyle, strumming and everything inbetween, and it came up trumps...A great deal of character and appeal" ***5 out of 5***
- Acoustic Magazine August 2013.

Faith
The Artist's Guitar

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WINNERS
Guitar
Awards
2013
Alvarez
Two-Rock

GEAR *of the* YEAR

Welcome to *Guitar & Bass* magazine's selection of the finest gear we've reviewed in the whole of 2013. From acoustics to electrics and basses, from weeny pedals to mighty stacks, we've seen a heck of a lot of the latest equipment on sale over the past 12 months and we humbly hope that the gear which has best dealt with our nerdily stringent filtering process has a great chance of serving you and your music not just in the short term but for many years to come. Dive in, read on and enjoy...

RHYTHM
TREBLE

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2013
Electric Guitar Under £500

GIBSON
SGJ

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 24/12

How much? And the real thing?

PRICE: **£499**
CONTACT: **Gibson Europe, 0031 347 324010**
www.gibson.com

The SG has always been a favourite of ours thanks to its aggressive tone, drop-dead gorgeous looks, and lightweight frame. The SGJ retains most of those qualities, but adds a sense of modernity that will sit better with today's players. In a way the SGJ is the spiritual successor to the classic Junior models. The stripped-back, no-frills approach is evident throughout the design – but all the same, we're not entirely sure how Gibson has managed to make an instrument this good for the price. It looks fantastic, plays beautifully, and sounds like a Gibson in all departments.

The two humbuckers at first glance look like EMGs or some other variant of active pickup thanks to their black plastic covers. In actuality they are a pair of Modern Classic non-active 'buckers. These are voiced to perform as slightly hotter PAF-style pickups, which they certainly do. The rest of the hardware is standard Gibson fare with no apparent skimping. With all the rock and roll vibe emanating from the SGJ it's tempting to slam on the overdrive and break out your best Angus Young chops, but that would be missing out on a significant part of the guitar's arsenal. Yes, it can deliver crunching power chords and deeply satisfying lead tones, but played clean the SGJ is also a sweet, sweet instrument.

Sure, a full-blown SG is smarter, sounds more refined, and will sell on for a good deal more, but that requires that you look after your investment. The SGJ is built to be used, abused, then used again because you had so much fun the last time. It's a road warrior that will age quickly due to the thin finish, and look all the better for it. With Gibson also making an LPJ as part of this 2013 range celebrating 'The Year of Les Paul', we're left wondering whether they've made a mistake; when you can get something this good for this little, why would you spend more? The SGJ is probably only going to be around for a limited time, so go out right now and buy one. You'll have to get in the queue behind us.

DIVILL BY ITALIA
F100

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 24/12

Kitsch, kooky and a little less dosh

PRICE **£429**
CONTACT **JHS, 0113 286 5381**
www.jhs.co.uk www.italiaguitars.com

Designed by a Brit and made in the Far East, Italia guitars have a deserved reputation for nostalgic frolics with an underpinning of modern practicality and solid construction. Now the company has that ultimate badge of big-time respectability: the 'brand within a brand'. The DiVills look a lot like Italias and are even built in the same factory.

The F100 certainly looks Italian, with distinct echoes of the Eko 700 and other lost gems of the '60s. The vibrato tailpiece looks uncannily like a Jazzmaster unit and the whammy can manage gentle Bigsby shimmers, even flatten down by a fourth or so if you really hammer it, and the roller saddles help it return to tune with impressive precision. The bridge humbucker has the 3+3 screw arrangement familiar to all Tele Deluxe owners and offers a pretty chunky slab of sonic beef. The plastic-covered single-coil pickups could have hopped right off a Mustang and give fresh, snappy sounds. Digging in brings out a nice natural snarl, and the in-between positions offer plenty of that infamous out-of-phase cluck. Overall, the guitar has been put together with impressive attention to detail and then finished immaculately.

The F100's single coils offer fresh and snappy sounds, while the humbucker is a chunky slab of sonic beef

EASTWOOD
Airline Jupiter

REVIEWED FEBRUARY 24/05

A Stratotone in all but name

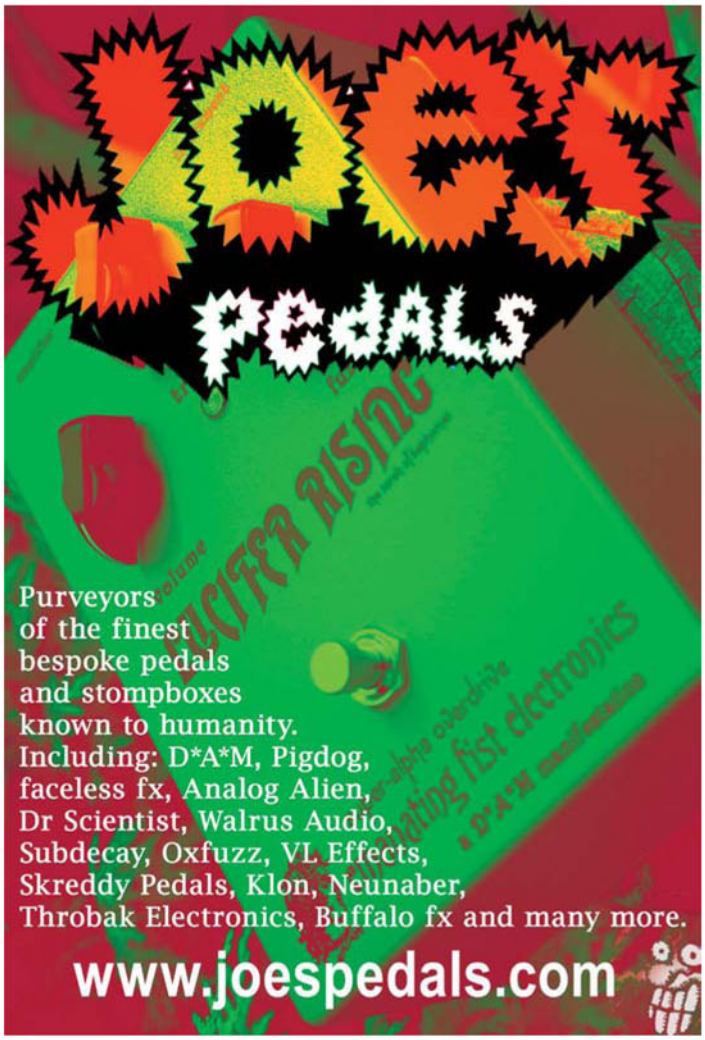
PRICE **£399**
CONTACT **Eastwood Guitars. +44 07791 551708**
www.eastwoodguitars.co.uk

Eastwood are famed for reviving leftfield vintage classics but, strictly speaking, this is not a reissue. There never was an Airline Jupiter, but there was a Silvertone Jupiter made by Harmony, who sold much the same guitar as the H-49 Stratotone, a model now finding favour with some collectors. The originals had a semi-solid body with a spruce top and back with maple sides, plus Rowe/DeArmond pickups which delivered classic twang with a vengeance.

Today's Jupiter riffs on these themes without being a slavish copy. The redburst finish with the white scratchplate looks the business. The bound rosewood neck is a pleasure to play; it's thin without being skinny and favours fast, accurate playing. Unplugged, the hollow build gives good volume, which makes it an ideal late-night couch guitar. The Airline Argyle Diamonds have a similar spec to the old DeArmonds, even emulating the 'multi-diamond' grille. A little amp grit and reverb is great for rockabilly, and mid-level distortion turns the Jupiter into a wiry '60s blues machine or a modern alt-rock contender, plus it sounds excellent with a germanium fuzz and tremolo.

The Jupiter is a great player with a real '60s sound. It would be excellent in the right covers band, but it can also hold its own in modern genres and gives you the feel of a quirky vintage classic without the issues associated with the originals.

The Airline Jupiter gives the feel of a quirky vintage classic without the issues of the originals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FREQUENSATOR
PAT. PENDING

WINNER
Guitar Awards 2013
Electric Guitar £500 to £1000

REVIEWED APRIL 24/07

EPIPHONE Anniversary 1962 Sheraton

Vintage style and tone on a budget

PRICE: **£599**
CONTACT: **Gibson, www.gibson.com**
www.epiphone.com

Launched at around the same time as Gibson's own ES-335, and sharing the same body shape and semi-hollow contruction, the Sheraton featured elaborate binding and inlays that made it, if anything, the more classy of the two models. By '62 the original single-coils had been switched to mini-humbuckers, and that's what graces this Sheraton... US-made Gibson ones, no less. The spec of the '62 reflects the moment when the model was possibly at its most desirable, including a lavish helping of pinstripe binding, a botanically questionable 'tree of life' headstock inlay, and a bling-athon of gold hardware including Grover tuners. The long Frequensator tailpiece is a snazzy vintage touch; trapeze tailpieces can make note-bending a strain because of all the extra string length behind the bridge, but this two-part design does ease that problem somewhat. The '60s slim taper mahogany neck, rosewood fretboard and medium jumbo frets are all flawless, and across the whole build the quality of finish is way better than we've any right to expect from a Chinese guitar.

Amplified the Sheriton actually sounds a lot like a Gibson SG; it has a similar tonal balance and just the same sweetness in the middle position, though the voice is slightly more open and relaxed. The wound strings have a great thump to them and the general impression is of smooth, ES-335-like purity. Overall the Sheraton is a very easy player, and for vintage style and feel in this price bracket – and it comes with a case – it's very hard to beat.

FENDER
Std Strat Plus Top

REVIEWED AUGUST 24/11

Flamed maple as standard

PRICE **£670.80**
CONTACT **Fender, GB&I 01342 331700**
www.fender.com

Sitting at the top end of the Mexican-made Fender range, the Plus Top is a fine example of a classic electric guitar. No corners have been cut on basic materials, the build quality is good, and the standard of the finish is high. The flamed maple top adds a nice visual touch without affecting the sound. It isn't a solid bookmatched top like the Custom Shop models – at this price it's a veneer – but it has a rich, three-dimensional flame with lots of depth.

The Plus Top is an all-round performer offering all the flexibility that helped establish the Stratocaster as one of the standards against which all other electric guitars are judged. The fingerboard is fast and snappy and the neck has a mellow, played-in feel. For more full-on soloing the Plus Top is a brilliant performer – the action is low and the guitar feels incredibly fast. Bends up past the 12th fret are especially satisfying, so it's really tempting to get lost in wig-out solo territory. You can pay considerably more for a new Strat depending on its point of origin and appointments, but this is a proper Strat with a classy-looking finish, and for a street price of around £500 it should give you years of pleasure.

For full-on soloing the Plus Top is a brilliant performer, the action is low and the guitar feels incredibly fast

IBANEZ
RG950QMZ Premium

REVIEWED AUGUST 24/11

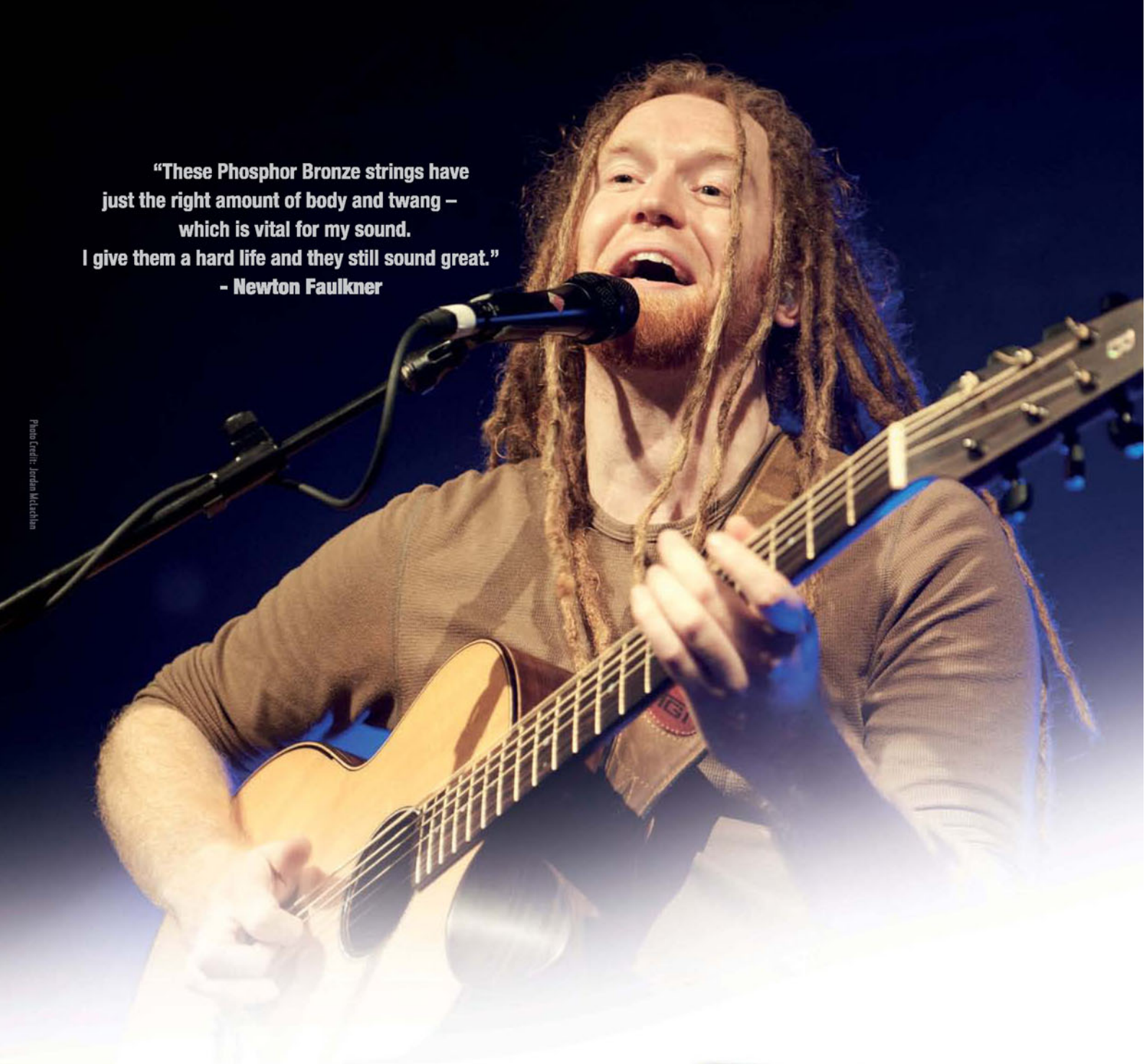
A mean lean rockin' machine

PRICE **£729**
CONTACT **Headstock, 0121 508 6666**
www.ibanez.com

Some metal-oriented guitars can feel a bit inert and lifeless, almost as though the manufacturer is seeking to minimise body resonance in order to let the pickups and amplifier do their thing unhindered. The RG950QMZ is the exact opposite – it feels light, dynamically responsive and expressive. It's also effortless to play, and the tuning is absolutely rock-solid. It's clear that Ibanez takes its vibrato systems very seriously; this one is a sophisticated locking unit and the bridge has been engineered to try to remove all possible points of friction.

The frets are beautifully rounded off and highly polished for player comfort. The HSH pickup configuration works well, and these humbuckers have been voiced for high output, clarity and a bass response that's deep but well defined. Single notes are crisp with effortless sustain, power chords have considerable weight and punch, while the middle pickup provides a pronounced contrast with the humbuckers: as single coils go, it has a high output level with a glassy, bright tone. Ibanez really does go above and beyond the call of duty to create these guitars. The RG950QMZ is nicely put together, feels ultra-solid and stable, and is clearly built for speed and convenience. It's a sleek, brutally functional, no-nonsense instrument, but also characterful and comfortable. Best of all, it sounds fantastic – and it's huge fun to play.

The RG950QMZ is a sleek, brutally functional instrument that sounds fantastic and is huge fun to play



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ELX-259-ADV-EN-JUN13

GRETSCH
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GRETSCH
G6137TCB Panther

Semi-solid and rock-friendly

PRICE: **£2830.80**
CONTACT**: Fender GB&I, 01342 331700**
www.fender.com

Despite their many charms, Gretsch guitars are seldom described as 'easy to play'. They're quirky, and fans tend to love them despite those quirks rather than because of them. The new White Panther is really clever because it irons out all of those quirks without losing that all-important essential Gretschiness.

The 'CB' in the guitar's name stands for the solid spruce centre block that goes from neck to tail, increasing sustain and reducing feedback. Add to that a body depth of 1.75" with a shorter-than-usual scale length of 24.625", and rather than being a traditional Gretsch hollow body it's more than a little reminiscent of Gibson's famed semi-solid ES-335.

The White Panther will hang on to any note just about as long as you want it to. Grinding away on the bridge pickup for the rhythm parts then flipping over to the neck for solos is like going from Malcolm Young's tone to a pretty convincing version of an Angus sound. However, the Panther delivers for woody-toned picking as well as high-gain shredding, so it should appeal to traditionalists and modern players alike. It's also supremely playable and so packed with sonic character that it must be very close to what Chet Atkins had in mind when he pleaded with Gretsch for more sustain during his tenure as the company's prime endorsee back in the '50s and '60s. He might have complained that the pickups were too hot... but we're guessing he would have approved mightily of everything else.

GIBSON
SG Original

Tribute to a classic design

PRICE **£1399**
CONTACT **Gibson, 0031 347 324010**
www.gibson.com

REVIEWED APRIL 24/07

The SG is often thought of as a devil-horned rock axe, but a good one can also be beautifully sweet and snappy through a clean amp. The SG Original really is a good one. In essence, it's a well-researched homage to the original 1961 SG/Les Paul Standard with the all-important small scratchplate plus a bound neck and PAF-style '57 Classic pickups.

A rich and ringy acoustic tone makes big promises, and the pickups are capable of keeping them. It's clucky at the top and woody at the bottom, with a perfect blend of warmth and clarity on the wound strings. The bridge pickup tends towards spikiness, but slam on the overdrive and that becomes the edgy attack of a masterly lead tone. The notoriously unstable Gibson Lyre Vibrato may not wobble more than a semitone or so and may not take you perfectly back to pitch every time, but this very crudity makes it feel directly responsive and therefore more musically expressive than any other vibrato out there. With an easy action all over the fretboard it's the sort of guitar you could play for hours at a time. This SG – designed to look, feel and sound 50-odd years old – proves that the past has a great future.

With an easy action all over the fretboard this is a guitar you could play for hours at a time

PRS
Brent Mason Signature

PRS with total versatility

PRICE **£2338.80**
CONTACT **PRS Europe, 44 1223 874 301**
www.prsguitars.com

REVIEWED AUGUST 24/11

Rated as one of the top 10 session players of all time, Brent Mason has been cited as being the most recorded guitarist ever. A 12-time winner of the Academy of Country Music Guitarist of the Year, his credits include Dolly Parton, Neil Diamond, Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard.

Mason's signature is a very different guitar for PRS, with a bolt-on neck and a 305 single coil middle pickup with a specially-wound 408 humbucker on either side. In addition, there's a five-way blade selector and a pair of mini toggle switches to tap the humbuckers for single coil sounds. That's nine different settings in total.

For clean blues, country, contemporary jazz and funk, the Brent Mason really shines. It's an excellent studio guitar for creating layered parts. It isn't a rock monster, but it was never designed to be; it loves a little amp break-up and mid-level distortion, and the clarity and overall articulation make it a great platform for effects. The build quality is superb – you'll be hard-pressed to find a production line instrument built with better materials or hardware. The pickup combination adds a degree of flexibility that hasn't been easily available without going completely custom and specifying your own wiring choices... and it's an especially tempting package when you find out that the street price may be as low as £1949.

A five-way selector and a pair of toggle switches to tap the humbuckers means nine settings in total

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GTR
SHOWROOM

REVIEWED
JUNE
24/09

SIGMA
000R-28V

Affordable take on a classic

PRICE: **£399**
CONTACT: **0141 248 4812**
www.westsidedistribution.com

If you're a fingerpicker at least some of the time then a rosewood 14-fret 000 must be near the top of your shopping list. It's simply one of the best all-round designs, being classic-looking, balanced-sounding and fitting into almost any genre – and though they generally lose out on sheer punch and volume to a dreadnought, they're so much more comfy, slim and grabbable... and that's hugely important.

Sigma's 000R-28V is made in China and combines laminated Indian rosewood back and sides with a really pretty, fine-grained, quarter-sawn solid sitka spruce top, all finished in gloss, while the back of the full-scale neck – slim in depth and a regular 1 11/16" at the nut – is finished in satin. It's got all the vintage-style trimmings too, including open-back tuners, herringbone binding, and attractive yellowy ivoroid binding.

So, good build quality for the money, and though some might like a wider nut, it's certainly easy to play – and it sounds fine too. This little guitar is promisingly loud for its size, and there's some sense of depth and complexity to the tone which elevates it above the Far Eastern-made crowd (and we'd expect it to get even better with some playing time under its belt). At under £400 this is a really likeable take on one of the all-time great designs and we'd recommend it to just about anybody.

TANGLEWOOD
TWJF

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 24/12

Exotic timbers and fine sound

PRICE **£299.95**
CONTACT **Tanglewood Guitars, 01937 841122**
www.tanglewoodguitars.co.uk

Tanglewood's Java series instruments have warm-toned solid cedar tops plus backs and sides with outside laminations combining rich, dark, almost ebony-like amara wood and spectacular golden, flamey spalted mango with characterful dark disease lines. It's one heck of a look, giving much of the aura of a super-high-end guitar. The TWJF is a 000 with a full 25.5" scale with all-wood trim and open-backed tuners. It's glossy and solidly built, and it also plays very nicely. The tone is bright yet silky, very together and controlled, with a firm bottom end and bouncy mids, while the smooth tuning and excellent intonation make it a pleasure to play everywhere on the neck. Cedar has a reputation as being an open-sounding topwood from the get-go and this one is certainly lively, but with a real richness underneath it all. For an extra £80 you can buy an effective Fishman-powered electro version with soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls, but as a pure acoustic the TWJF also delivers the goods very handsomely indeed.

Cedar has a reputation as an open-sounding topwood and the Tanglewood TWJF is certainly lively and rich

BEDELL
HGM-28-G

REVIEWED FEBRUARY 24/05

Brightness and simplicity

PRICE **£449**
CONTACT **01376 550033**
www.rosetti.co.uk

What – yet *another* Orchestra Model in our Best Acoustic Under £500 category this year? Hey, that's the way it goes. This Bedell keeps its price down by combining a solid spruce top – really great quality, with straight, tight grain and cross-silking aplenty – with laminated rosewood back and sides. Overall, it's a neat, unfussy design: no pearl, no glitz, just simple binding, a two-tone marquetry logo on the rosewood-faced headstock and a herringbone soundhole rosette. We also like the fact that both nut and saddle are real bone. The solid top makes its presence felt from the word go, with a lively and eager dynamic response and complex harmonic overtones. We love the crispness, clarity and airiness; it isn't all that powerful in the low end, especially in dropped tunings, but a heavier set of strings would be a cheap upgrade that would improve the playability and tone. Even so, it's an enjoyable guitar to play. The lack of bass authority can be forgiven because the high frequencies shimmer and chime with an appealingly ethereal quality that rewards a delicate touch. There's plenty of volume and dynamic range on offer too, and the neck profile is supremely comfortable. For its price, few guitars could challenge the HGM-28-G for looks or build quality.

The Bedell HGM-28-G shimmers and chimes, and for the price few guitars could challenge it for looks or quality

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For more information on the Breedlove range visit: *www.rosetti.co.uk/breedlove*

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ATKIN
J-35 Deluxe Koa

Scrumptious slope-shoulder

PRICE: **£3750**
CONTACT**: Atkin Guitars, 01227 719933**
www.atkinguitars.com

Britain's Alister Atkin has already shown what he do can do with a whole bunch of US-inspired designs, but this one is very different – and pretty special. The J-35 in Atkin terminology is a 12-fret version of a slope-shouldered guitar… much like a Gibson Roy Smeck, which is a vintage model with a famously huge, warm tone. This guitar has a sitka spruce top and delicious koa back and sides, a mahogany neck that's bolted on in the modern style with an ebony fingerboard, and rich touches like gold tuners and a soundhole rosette of reconstituted black stone with gold marbling. The sound caters to tastes both old and new by combining brightness and balance with a sense of depth and a softness and thickness that fans of ancient Gibsons will definitely dig. Part of it is the koa: you've got the fundamental, mahogany-like punch, plus ringing overtones not unlike rosewood. That 12-fret neck also moves the bridge down the body, and this could be contributing exceptional thump and vibrancy to the bottom end and mids. As an old-time flatpicker, it's great; as a fingerpicker in standard or dropped tunings it might be even better. This guitar's sound is really exceptionally big, and the build quality is as high as you'd expect at this price. Atkin's J-35 is a great demonstration of how he can pull together traditional influences with a modern eye to make a world-class whole.

LARRIVEE
Larrivee D-02

REVIEWED OCTOBER 25/01

Top value, Canadian-style

PRICE **£899**
CONTACT **Sound Technology, 01462 480000**
www.larrivee.com

Larrivée's 02 series guitars are not cheap, but they are relatively affordable, and they're still made in Canada. Decoration is minimal and the finish is a hand-rubbed matt. They use lower-grade timber… but that doesn't mean sonically inferior, because this D-02 has a very free, responsive tone. The low notes have ample thump with a rounded quality, but there's plenty of snap and definition too, so the bottom end isn't overshadowed by the chiming trebles. There's a classic mahogany-like dryness here plus good harmonic complexity, and it projects with real authority and retains a solid underpinning even when tuned down as far as D or C. Note-to-note balance is even enough for fingerpicking and it's a blast for strumming.

Drawbacks? None, if you don't mind perhaps a slightly less-than-perfect grain to the spruce top or the odd tiny knot in the sapele back and sides. That aside, this is a sweet-playing, solidly-made Larrivée through and through. They've made savings rather than compromises, and the result is a fine guitar which offers really good value.

If you don't mind slightly less than perfect grain, this is a sweet-playing, solidly-made Larrivée through and through

FAITH
FRMG Mars

REVIEWED NOVEMBER 25/02

Mahogany mojo

PRICE **£689**
CONTACT **Barnes & Mullins, 01691 652449**
www.faithguitars.com

There's no danger that all-mahogany guitars will oust the familiar formula of spruce over mahogany or rosewood, but open-minded players may discover a unique and compelling sonic flavour. The Faith FRMG Mars is an all-solid timber slope-shouldered dreadnought with a figured Macassar ebony fingerboard and bridge, plus matching ebony binding, which looks fantastic. Underneath it all is X-bracing designed, like the rest of the guitar, by the UK's Patrick James Eggle, who definitely knows his onions. We liked the combination of a gloss-finish body and a satin neck, and the low string action and shallow C-shaped neck profile provide a smooth and effortless feel – in fact, the Mars requires barely any more effort to play than most electric guitars. The response is free and dynamic, so you don't need to play hard to get the wood moving, and this guitar combines the intimate, woody tones of a typical all-mahogany instrument with a bit of extra brightness and chime to bring it up to date. The bass isn't too generous, but it's snappy and well-defined. This makes for a lovely '60s folk fingerpicker; sensitive, characterful, and great with a capo. It's hard to criticise the quality or playability of this guitar… and we'd say the same if the price was doubled.

The Faith FMRG Mars combines typical intimate, woody mahogany tones with a bit of extra brightness and chime

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Alvarez

REVIEWED
APRIL
24/07

ALVAREZ
AD70CE

Fine-playing cutaway dread

PRICE: **£499**
CONTACT**: Go To Guitars, 01925 444696**
www.gotoguitars.com

The Alvarez Artist Series AD70CE is a simple, no-fuss guitar that falls into the lower-midrange price bracket but excels tonally. The look is classic dreadnought, but with a cutaway and the famous Alvarez Bi-Level bridge, which uses a lower rear-routed platform behind the saddle slot to increase string break angle and downward pressure over the compensated bone saddle, thereby – says Alvarez – increasing string vibration across the soundboard. It's got a solid spruce top and laminated rosewood back and sides, scalloped bracing, and a B-Band-designed SY650 preamp which can blend between a flexible undersaddle pickup and a transducer beneath the soundboard.

We were hugely impressed with the slick feel of the neck, and with the factory set-up too. The sound is good as well: it's got plenty of warmth and volume with a plectrum, while fingerpicking seems to coax out the kind of even, bloomy resonance you might associate with a much older and more mature piece of wood. The electro side is a neat, simple little system clearly designed with the player in mind as much as the sound guy, and the onboard tuner works well. The price is right, the playability is great, the unplugged sound is very fine, and the dual-source pickup lifts this Alvarez above the competition. Want a stage-ready guitar? This will do the job.

FRESHMAN
Apollo Boutique AB3 Autumn

REVIEWED JANUARY 24/04

Handsome koa-topped OOO

PRICE **£499**
CONTACT **www.freshmanguitars.net**

This OOO-size cutaway electro leaves a striking impression. The top, back and sides are luscious laminated koa, while the binding is rosewood; there's abalone around the top purfling and in the soundhole rosette, and the succulent sunburst really makes for an eye-catching guitar. The 14-fret, regular-scale neck is mahogany, and all 20 frets are easily accessible via the cutaway. Tuners are closed-back gold-plated Grovers, the nut and saddle are bone, and the pickup system mates an undersaddle transducer to a Fishman Sonitone preamp with simple Volume and Tone controls inside the soundhole. The tone is as tight and focussed as expected from a OOO body, with an underlying warmth and just a hint of new-guitar brittleness. The koa seems to create a solid midrange with a buttery bloom and rounded highs – similar in a way to an all-mahogany Guild. Plugging in, the simple but effective pickup system quickly allows you to find a decent sound; it's not the most convincing we've heard and it lacks a little woodiness at its core, but it gets the job done without any fuss. With its koa build and sunburst finish, the AB3 Autumn is a striking and quite effective guitar. If you're in the market for a mid-level electro-acoustic that'll stand out on stage, this should be on your list.

The koa top gives a solid midrange with rounded highs and the pickup does the job with no fuss

YAMAHA
APX500II

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 24/12

Old campaigner gets even better

PRICE **£329**
CONTACT **Yamaha Europe, 0844 811 1116**
uk.yamaha.com

Yamaha's APX series has always delivered on the 'electro' side of the electro-acoustic combination, and the latest 500II has undergone a number of tweaks including a new preamp, a new pickup, a trussrod redesign and a slight change in trim. It looks as if it costs far more – what a handsome sunburst – and as ever, it's light and compact with a super-speedy neck (the only drawback for some will be the narrow nut, but some players may prefer it). The pickup now comes with six piezo elements instead of a continuous strip, while the quick-change spring-loaded battery drawer on the upper treble side takes two 1.5v AAs, so you could use rechargeables. Acoustically the shallow body with its laminated spruce top is never going to win a volume throwdown, but we like the way it delivers. It's scooped, with a hint of travel-guitar boxiness, but there's a sweet warmth and elasticity to the attack that lends itself well to single-string work as well as comped chords and strumming. Plugged in, the 500II delivers excellent string balance without any horrid-sounding extremes in terms of treble or bass; it doesn't sound very piezo-y or elasticky at all, just full and rich. You could take this guitar straight onstage the day you bought it and get a workable sound without any worries at all.

The APX has always delivered on the electro side, and the 500II has a new pickup and preamp that sounds full and rich

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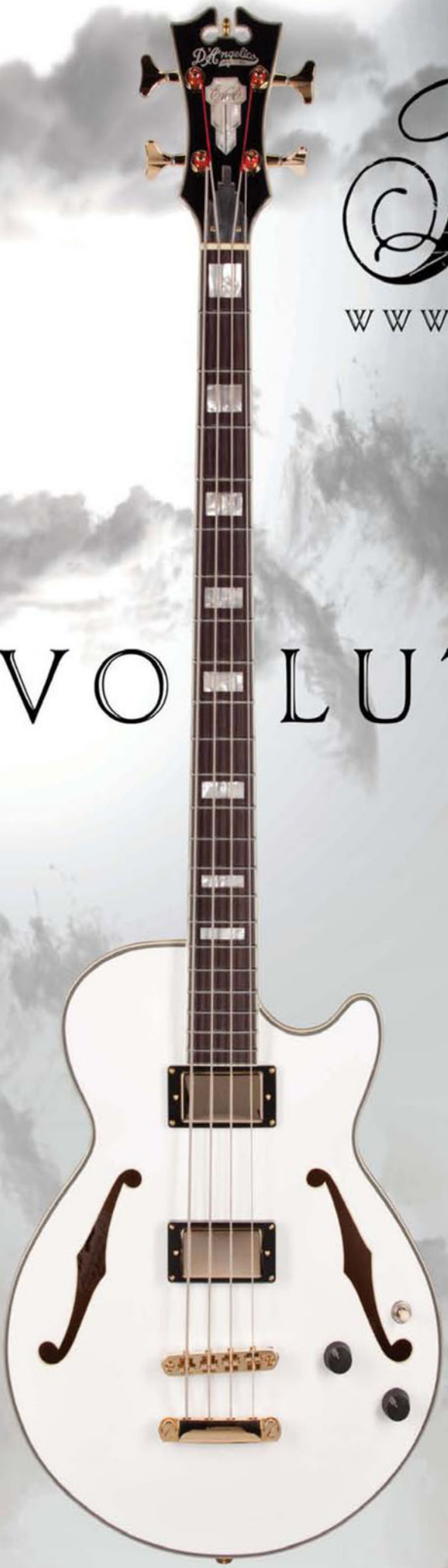

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Guitar Awards 2013
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REVIEWED AUGUST 24/11

TAYLOR 618e

Maple Grand Orchestra

PRICE: **£2762**
CONTACT: **Taylor Guitars , 31 (0) 20 667 6033**
www.taylorguitars.com

There's no substitute for cubes, as petrolheads are wont to say, and the Grand Orchestra is the biggest, deepest six-string Taylor design to date. Being a 6 Series it's got solid figured maple back and sides and a solid spruce top, plus a maple neck mated to a rosewood board, plus white binding and an abalone rosette. Sizeable, then, and gorgeous – but at this price it's got to sound good too.

It does. It sounds as big as it looks, but not in a crass or overblown way. Maple acoustics are generally held to be bright and the 618e conforms to that, but the upper partials are supported by a strong midrange and a bass end so profound that you may find yourself feeling around inside for a hidden subwoofer. Despite this, the 618e is not in the least bit boomy – it's solid and well-defined, with such a wonderfully chesty and elastic 'whump' that you'll feel compelled to start playing bluegrass-style rhythm. Swapping over to a thumbpick for boom-chicky Travis picking, palm-muted bass notes pop right off the soundboard like a front-skinned bass drum, while it responds to a delicate touch too, making this a formidable fingerstyle instrument. The Expression System combines a magnetic under-string sensor with two body sensors, and it does a fine job of translating the natural acoustic tone. Glamour and tone – this guitar is pretty much what a Gibson J-200 always wanted to be.

SEAGULL
Maritime SWS Folk HG

REVIEWED MAY 24/08

Affordable craftsmanship

PRICE **£799**
CONTACT **440 Distribution, 01132 589599**
www.440distribution.com

With its unfussy appointments and almost classical shape this Seagull aims to impress via the ears as well as the eyes. Made in Canada, it has a solid spruce top and solid mahogany back and sides, all finished in a high gloss. Soundwise it has a percussive kind of quality with plenty of midrange and attenuated trebles and bass – a 'flat' kind of tone which suits both flatpicking and fingerpicking and which should suit any application where the guitar needs to punch through the mix. The amplified sound comes via a Godin QI preamp with Volume, Bass and a digital tuner, and the simple EQ is surprisingly versatile, offering enough range to render a flexible feel despite the lack of any dedicated anti-feedback. The system is easy to use, although you may need to balance the volume with the EQ to kill any feedback. The performance is good, with virtually no handling noise. This guitar is all about traditional feel, avoiding conspicuous bling and more than compensating with convincing build quality. It's tough, roadworthy and playable, and offers very good value for money indeed.

The bright-sounding Maritime Folk HG will suit any application where you need to punch through the mix

PRS
SE Angelus Custom

REVIEWED MARCH 24/06

Electric builder goes acoustic

PRICE **£979**
CONTACT **PRS Europe, 44 1223 874 301**
www.prsguitars.com

The first time we tried a high-end US-made PRS acoustic we were quite surprised at its wide-open, unique sound, and the budget SE line has been honed to deliver many of the same qualities. It's made in Korea with a solid spruce top and laminated rosewood back and sides, hybrid X/strut bracing and PRS signifiers such as the spiky headstock and bird inlays, and the standard of fit and finish is very good. It sounds mature right out of the box, with a clear, balanced voice that backs up its crystal-clear upper registers with a real sense of depth; this is a rich, classy-sounding acoustic capable of subtlety as well as power. The optional electronics marry an undersaddle piezo with a PRS preamp with a three-band EQ with mid-scoop and anti-feedback switches. The amplified tones can sound a bit hard and brittle compared to the guitar's acoustic sound but the electronics are flexible enough to dial in a fair approximation of the SE's natural voice. PRS seems to have got its sums right; the Angelus offers a winning combination of understatedly elegant looks and a very impressive tone. This company may not be at the forefront of people's minds when considering an acoustic guitar but the Angelus SE presents a very persuasive case for changing all that.

The PRS SE Angelus Deluxe is a rich, classy-sounding acoustic capable of subtlety as well as power

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Electric Guitars

8030 - 1963 Gibson ES175 Jazz Guitar, Sunburst
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
10066 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10055 - Brian May Red Special, Metal May
7028 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10065 - Brian May Red Special, Baby Blue
10061 - Brian May Red Special, Black
10063 - Brian May Red Special, Gold
10064 - Brian May Red Special, Green
10059 - Brian May Red Special, Honey Sunburst
10058 - Brian May Red Special, Natural
10057 - Brian May Red Special, Sunburst
10062 - Brian May Red Special, White
10060 - Brian May Red Special, Windermere Blue
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10231 - Brooks Custom Steve, Lukather Clone
9767 - Cort G260 Electric Guitar
10224 - Cort M600 AVD Antique Violin Dark
10220 - Cort Sunset II in Black
10223 - Cort X6 S-M BK Electric Guitar in Black
7793 - DBZ Barchetta Eminent FR Absinthe
7785 - DBZ Barchetta ST, Aubergine
7789 - DBZ Barchetta ST FR, Cobalt Blue
7814 - DBZ Cruciffxion Electric Guitar
7810 - DBZ Dark Angel Electric Guitar
7812 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Devil
7811 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Preacher
7800 - DBZ Bolero AB, Solid Wine Red
7796 - DBZ Bolero FM, Trans Wine
7794 - DBZ Bolero ST, Black
7837 - DBZ Venom, Dark Blue Metallic
9770 - Dean Evo, Pre-Owned
5043 - Duesenberg 49er Cow Limited Edition
5040 - Duesenberg Rocket II in Black & White
10233 - ESP LTD MH50, Black, Pre-Owned
9769 - Encore Electric Guitar, Black
5205 - Epiphone Broadway Jazz Semi, Natural
8220 - Epiphone ES339 Semi Hollowbody, Ebony
9155 - Epiphone ES339, Natural
8528 - Epiphone ES339 Ultra, Vintage Sunburst
5432 - Epiphone G310 SG Shape, White
9631 - Epiphone Joe Pass Emperor II, Natural
9695 - Epiphone Les Paul Special II Cherryburst
9905 - Epiphone LP Stan Plustop Pro, Cherry S/B
10351 - Epiphone LP Stand. Plustop Pro, Wine Red
8365 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard In Gold
10352 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard, Ebony
10217 - Epiphone Les Paul Studio, Sunburst, S/H
9604 - Epiphone Les Paul Ultra III Alpine White
8096 - Epiphone Ltd Ed Flying V, Antique White
8165 - Epiphone Ltd Ed 1961 SG, Alpine White
9666 - Epiphone Phrophecy LP Custom Plus GX
8101 - Epiphone by Gibson, Pre-Owned
4231 - Fender Am Special Strat, Candy Apple Red
9074 - Fender American Special Strat, Sunburst
9914 - Fender Am. Special Tele, Vintage Blonde
9348 - Fender American Stan. Hand Stained Strat
10199 - Fender Am Stand. Strat LH, Sburst
9910 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Mystic Blue
8342 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Sienna Sburst
9134 - Fender American Stratocaster Daphne Blue
9023 - Fender American Vintage '70s Strat Reissue, Nat
9287 - Fender Blacktop Stratocaster HH, Black
10072 - Fender Classic Player Baja Telecaster, Blonde
9261 - Fender C. Player Jaguar Spec HH, White
9559 - Fender Custom Shop 1960 Relic Strat, GR
7112 - Fender Deluxe Lonestar Strat, Sunburst
10163 - Fender FSR 72 Telecaster Deluxe, Aqua Flake
10198 - Fender FSR Am Stan. Strat, LH, Sunburst
9065 - Fender FSR Strat HSS TBX Amber Burst
10218 - Fender Japanese Strat, CAR, Pre-Owned
4634 - Fender Jim Root Signature Strat, Black
9775 - Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar, Metallic KO
10164 - Fender Kurt Cobain Mustang, Sonic Blue
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9945 - Fender Modern Player Strat HSS, O. White
8224 - Fender Modern Player Telecaster, Honey Burst
8286 - Fender Modern Player Tele Thinline Delux
7784 - Fender Mustang Pawn Shop Special, Red
9089 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Black
9090 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Blonde
10149 - Fender Pink Paisley Telecaster, Used
5287 - Fender Road Worn 50s Strat in Black
8290 - Fender Road Worn 60's Strat, Sunburst
4229 - Fender Road Worn Player Strat, Sunburst
4232 - Fender Road Worn Player Tele, Black
9449 - Fender Select Tele USA Violin Burst
10101 - Fender Standard Strat, CAR, Secondhand
7954 - Fender Standard Strat, Copper Met Burst
4560 - Fender Standard Telecaster, Black
4748 - Fender Standard Tele, Brown Sunburst
10090 - Fender Telebration Mahogany Tele, Sburst
9911 - Fender USA 75 Telebration, Natural
9507 - Fender USA Hardtail Stratocaster 1977
8285 - Fret King Jerry Donahue, Natural
9137 - G&L ASAT Classic Bluesboy Semi, Natural
9140 - G&L ASAT Classic in Walnut
9136 - G&L Legacy in Black
9135 - G&L S500 in Blueburst
9150 - Gibson ES137 Custom, Triburst
8029 - Gibson ES175 1956 Original
9277 - Gibson ES330 VOS, Vintage Sunburst
10146 - Gibson ES335 Dot Plain Gloss, Sunburst

Electric Guitars

10273 - Gibson ES339 Antique Sunburst
9840 - Gibson Lee Roy Parnell Goldtop
8376 - Gibson Les Paul Classic 60s Trans Ebony
5317 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Alpine White
7919 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Wine Red
10197 - Gibson Les Paul Signature T, Trans Ebony
9444 - Gibson Les Paul Standard 2012 Goldtop
10116 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Prem. Tea Burst
10117 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Premi. Trans Amber
10144 - Gibson LP St Premium Plus, Desert Burst
10322 - Gibson Les Paul Stand., Heritage Cherry
9341 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Radiant Red
5090 - Gibson Les Paul Studio Lefty, Wine Red
9557 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10281 - Gibson Les Paul Trad., Caramel Burst
8202 - Gibson Nighthawk, Pelham Blue
5594 - Gibson SG Special Electric Guitar in White
10350 - Gibson SG Special Faded Cherry
10268 - Gretsch G5422TDCG Hollow Body ,White
9771 - Ibanez S470DXQM
9764 - Italia Electric Guitar, Pre-Owned
9161 - Jackson RR5 Japanese Ivory Pinstripe
4992 - Jackson JS30 Randy Rhoads, Black
4150 - Jackson SL3MG Soloist, Natural
9669 - Jackson Super Light Soloist SLSXMG GMG
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8051 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Black
8052 - Lodestone Electric Artist in Sunburst
8048 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Honey
8049 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Red
8059 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Chignal Blue
8065 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Rodings White
8058 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Tobacco Sburst
8066 - Lodestone Electric Pro S in Waltham Black
8055 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Chignal Blue
8056 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Rodings White
8053 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Roxwell Red
8057 - Lodestone Electric Pro, St James Silver
8054 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Tobacco Sunburst
8072 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, T. Sburst
8070 - Lodestone Electric Standard Trans Black
8071 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, White
8069 - Lodestone Electric Standard in White
8085 - Lodestone Pulse in Burr Maple Honeyburst
8086 - Lodestone Pulse, Matt Black
8084 - Lodestone Pulse in Metallic Gold
8087 - Lodestone Pulse, Tobacco Sunburst
7091 - MusicMan Luke HSS, Pearl Blue
4720 - MusicMan Silhouette Special, Candy Red
0000 - PRS - 12 Models in stock now
6123 - Patrick Eggle Double Cutaway in Blue
6121 - Patrick Eggle RSG Electric Guitar, Amber
9478 - Peavey AT200 Antares AutoTune Guitar
9450 - Peavey EVH Wolfgang USA-Made Goldtop
9001 - Peavey Rockmaster Captain America
9300 - Peerless Martin Taylor Virtuoso
4268 - Rickenbacker 330 12 String Semi, Jetglo
6951 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Fireglo
6952 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Jetglo
4270 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Mapleglo
10165 - Road Worn Player Tele, Candy Apple Red
8992 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Black
8993 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Sunburst
9857 - Roland G5A Strat Candy Apple Red
8990 - Roland GC1 Black GK-Ready Stratocaster
8991 - Roland GC1 Sunburst GK-Ready Strat
0000 - Squier - 6 models in stock now
0000 - Stagg - 3 models in stock now
9273 - Steinberger Spirit GT Pro
10131 - Traveller Speedster, Blue, Pre-Owned
9079 - Ventures VM100SB Bob Bogle Sig, Sunburst
9078 - Ventures VM65MBL Electric Guitar, Blue
4256 - Vintage AV2, Sunburst
9420 - Vox Apache I
9652 - Warwick Electric Guitar Accessory Pack
6982 - Washburn USADD70 Maya Dan Donegan, Grey
4757 - Washburn N1 Vintage Nuno Bettencourt Nat
7074 - Washburn SI61 Obey Scott Ian Sig, Black
6991 - Washburn USA Custom WI556, Metallic Red
6997 - Washburn V200 ProE in Black
7005 - Washburn WI100, Gunmetal Grey
7002 - Washburn WI100, Red
7009 - Washburn WI15 Idol Standard ,Black
8412 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Black
8411 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Red
7356 - Washburn WI420KB Idol, Black
8409 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Elect Flame Honey
8408 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Tobacco Sunburst
8406 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric, Black
8405 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric in White
6988 - Washburn WI50 in Black
6989 - Washburn WI50 Pro-E, Black
8404 - Washburn WI-63 SF Donegan Sig, Black
6995 - Washburn WV40VASIK Scott Ian Blood Splat
6996 - Washburn WV66ANC, Nick Catanese, Black
6898 - Washburn WI14 Idol in Metallic Blue
6899 - Washburn WI14 Idol in Wine Red
8230 - Washburn X10 Bass Guitar, Black
6895 - Washburn X100 in Metallic Grey
6900 - Washburn X200 Pro in Trans Black
6425 - Westcoast ST Junior in Black & Sunburst
6449 - Westcoast ST1 in Ivory, Red & Natural
8416 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Red Metallic
8414 - Yamaha Pacifica 012, Dark Blue Metallic
10234 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Black
8121 - Yamaha Pacifica 311H, Vintage White
8184 - Yamaha Pacifica 510V , Candy Apple Red
10319 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 VHFM
8124 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 Root Beer

Acoustic & Electro Acoustics

8033 - Breedlove AD25/SM
8035 - Breedlove AJ250/SF Plus Electro Acoustic
10296 - Breedlove Atlas Solo Series C350/CR
10284 - Breedlove Cascade C25/CRE Electro
10285 - Breedlove Cascade OM/CRe S Cutaway
10287 - Breedlove Passport C250/COe Electro
10288 - Breedlove Passport D/MiMe Electro
10289 - Breedlove Passport D250SMe Electro
10299 - Breedlove Passport PLUS D/CME Electro
10292 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250/SBe Elect
7979 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250SFE
4282 - Breedlove Passport + D/SFE Elec Sunburst
10301 - Breedlove Passport Plus D250/SB Electro
10300 - Breedlove Passport Plus OM/CMe HH
10294 - Breedlove Retro D/ERe with LR Baggs
10295 - Breedlove Retro OM/ER Orchestra Electro
10298 - Breedlove Revival OM/SMe Top Burst
4283 - Breedlove Solo C35/Sme Electro, Natural
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10219 - Cort NDX50 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10221 - Cort SFX-E NS Electro, Natural Satin
10125 - DRL 008 8 String Electro Acoustic Guitar
10124 - DRL CT09 Thinline Electro Acoustic
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
8905 - Eko Ranger Vintage 12 String w/Fishman
9206 - Epiphone EJ200CE, Natural
5157 - Epiphone EJ200CE Jumbo Vintage SunB.
9542 - Faith FMETB Mercury Electro Parlour
9104 - Faith Saturn Cutaway High Gloss FSCEHG
8300 - Faith FECS Electro Acoustic Guitar
10320 - Fender CD60CE Mahogany
7881 - Fender Kingman SCE, Dreadnought, Nat
6929 - Fender Stratacoustic, Electro, Black
10194 - Fender T-Bucket 300CE, Amber
6930 - Fender Telecoustic, Electro, Black
10243 - Fender Tim Armstrong Deluxe
10106 - Fylde Alchemist Electro Acoustic
7867 - Gibson J200 Standard Electro in Natural
7032 - Gibson J200 Standard Jumbo Guitar
8241 - Gibson J200 Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10150 - Gibson J35 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10143 - Gibson LG2 American Eagle
10147 - Gibson SJ100 Modern Classic V.Sunburst
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
4554 - Jimmy Moon PF0003 Electro, Pau Ferro
6948 - Jimmy Moon RD3, Electro, Natural
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
7302 - LAG T66ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electro
7972 - LAG T200ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electric
5403 - Levin LD60CE, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
9243 - James Neligan NA72CBB Electro Acoustic
0000 - Levin - 5 models in stock now
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
6404 - Northwood R70 00 14fret Electro, Natural
4400 - Northwood R80, 000V Electro, Natural
6403 - Northwood R80, 0M Electro, Natural
9841 - Ovation Adamas 1581-7 Electro Acoustic
5093 - Ovation CDX24 Electro Acoustic in Natural
10033 - Ovation Celebrity CC44S AB, Autumn
10031 - Ovation Pro Elite 2078AX
10032 - Ovation Pro Elite TX 1868TX Super
10151 - Ovation Pro Speciality 1773AX-4 Natural,
9299 - Peerless Martin Taylor Maestro
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10038 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
9820 - Rainsong CO-DR1000N2
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9814 - Rainsong DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10097 - Rainsong H-DR1100N2
10100 - Rainsong H-OM1000N2
10098 - Rainsong H-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10084 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Blue
10086 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Green
10085 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Pewter
10087 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Red
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
10091 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Blue
10092 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Green
10093 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Pewter
10089 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Red
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Std
9823 - Rainsong S-OM1000N2 OM Studio Electro
9822 - Rainsong S-WS1000N2 WS Studio Electro
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
9828 - RainSong Shorty Fine Texture SFT Model
7974 - Rainsong WS1000 Graphite Guitar
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5256 - Satori YD28EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5252 - Satori YD28HEQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
9536 - Sigma 000MC 15E Electro Acoustic Guitar
10303 - Takamine EG340SC, Pre-Owned
0000 - Tanglewood - 17 models in stock now
10118 - Terry Pack PLSR Parlour w/Pre-Amp
9615 - Terry Pack SJRS Small Jumbo LR Baggs M1A
8007 - Vintage Gordon Gilltrap Signature
9561 - Vintage VEC1400 Electro Acoustic
9535 - Walden CG570CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
8307 - Westcoast SW201BK -VT Acoustic Guitar
8305 - Westcoast SW201RDS VT Electro Acoustic
8306 - Westcoast SW201VT Acoustic Guitar
6960 - Yamaha CPX500 Electro in Red
9190 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Dusk Sun Red
8020 - Yamaha CPX700, Tinted Finish
9191 - Yamaha FGX730SC Electro Acoustic, Nat.
9192 - Yamaha FJX730SC Electro Acoustic, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic in Nat.
8141 - Yamaha SLG110S Silent Steel String

Bass Guitars

8687 - Breedlove Passport Plus B350/CB4
10297 - Breedlove Solo BJ350/CMe4 Fretless Bass
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
10108 - Cort A4 4 String Bass Guitar, Natural
10107 - Cort A4 Custom Z 4 String Bass Guitar
10109 - Cort A5 5 String Bass, Open Pore Natural
10105 - Cort A5 OPBC Bass Guitar
10110 - Cort B5 5 String Bass Guitar, OPN
10213 - Cort GB75WBL 5 String Bass, White Blonde
10242 - ESP LTD B204 SM, Natural, Pre-Owned
4882 - Fender USA 62 Vintage Precision Sunburst
10166 - Fender 75 Jazz Bass in Natural
9083 - Fender Am Special Jazz Bass, Sunburst
9353 - Fender Am St Hand Stained Ash Jazz Bass
9231 - Fender Am Standard Jazz Bass, Sunburst
7943 - Fender Am Stan Precision Bass, Sunburst
9727 - Fender FSR Precision, Sea Foam Metallic
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9367 - Fender Select Jazz Bass, Amber Burst
9284 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Arctic White
8287 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Brown S.burst
9909 - Fender Standard P Bass, Lake Placid Blue
10113 - G & L M2000 4 String Bass Guitar, Honeyburst
10112 - G & L M2500 5 String Bass, Honeyburst
9703 - G & L Tribute Series JB2, Natural
9138 - G&L L2000 Tribute Bass, 3-Tone Sunburst
9702 - G&L L2500 5 String Bass, Walnut
9593 - Gibson Firebird Studio Reverse 70s Bass
9575 - Gibson Grabber 3 70s Tribute Honeyburst
10074 - Gretsch G6073 Electrotone Bass, Burgundy
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8073 - Lodestone Primal Artist
8075 - Lodestone Primal Instinct J Bass, Green
8079 - Lodestone Primal Instinct P Bass, Green
8080 - Lodestone Primal Instinct Pbass Sunburst
8081 - Lodestone Primal Pro In Chignal Blue
8082 - Lodestone Primal Pro 4, Tobacco Sunburst
8174 - Lodestone Primal Pro 5, Chignal Blue
4179 - Marleaux Consat Custom 5, Satin Black
10279 - Marleaux Consat Sig 4 String Bolt On
5713 - Marleaux M Bass Custom 5, Maple & Walnut
10278 - Marleaux Votan XS Deluxe, Black
10216 - MusicMan Sterling 4, Blue, Pre-Owned
4703 - MusicMan Stingray 2EQ, Blue Pearl
4781 - MusicMan Stingray 3EQ, True Gold
4920 - MusicMan Stingray 5, Black
8997 - Musicman Sterling SB14 Bass, Sunburst
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
9002 - Overwater Aspiration Deluxe Bass, Black
8435 - Overwater Aspiration Std 4, Black Cherry
7849 - Overwater Contemporary Jazz, Trans Blue
9009 - Overwater Contemporary 5-String Bass
9867 - Overwater Inspiration Jazz PJ 4 String
10102 - Overwater J Series Deluxe 4, Natural
7259 - Overwater Perception Std 5, Bubinga
10152 - Overwater Progress Deluxe, Pre-Owned
9418 - Rickenbacker Bass, Jetglo Rick Kemp
5121 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black
7204 - Squier Classic Vibe Precision 50s Blonde
9072 - Squier Vintage Modified 70's Jazz, Nat
9517 - Squier Vintage Modified Tele Bass, Black
9704 - Stagg BC300 Lefthanded 4 String, Nat
4417 - Steinberger Spirit XT2 4 String Bass
9428 - Tobias Toby Standard IV Bass Guitar, White
9653 - Warwick Bass Guitar Accessory Gig Pack
6447 - Westcoast BG2, Natural or Trans Red
6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
6445 - Westcoast BG5 Fretless, Natural
6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber
8438 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Black
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red
10120 - Yamaha BB1024X 4 String, Caramel Brown
4649 - Yamaha BB2024X, Vintage White
9350 - Yamaha BB424 Bass Guitar in Black
9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass Guitar, Black
9352 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass, Sunburst
9000 - Yamaha RBX170
10314 - Yamaha RBX170EW Bass
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass
4331 - Yamaha TRB1004J, Trans Black
10307 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass
10308 - Yamaha TRBX305 Bass
10310 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Classical Guitars

0000 - Azahar - 6 models in stock now
10290 - Breedlove Passport N250/COe Electro
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 6 models in stock now
9482 - Ovation 1616 Classical Guitar, Pre-Owned
0000- Raimundo - 4 models in stock now
0000 - Ramirez - 10 models in stock now
5828 - Roberto - 3 models in stock now
5481 - Strunal Electro Classical Guitar
9404 - Takamine G344RC Electro, Wine Red
0000 - Tanglewood - 4 models in stock now
8351 - Westcoast - 5 models in stock now
10323 - Yamaha CGX102 Guitar
10321 - Yamaha NTX700 Guitar

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

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REVIEWED FEBRUARY 24/05

YERASOV
GTA 15

The Yerasov GTA 15 – a 15W all-valve combo with a single 10" speaker, designed and built in Russia – is a killer bargain. It's no looker, admittedly, but dig a little deeper: the speaker is a Jensen C10Q, the valves – including the twin EL84 output tubes – are JJs, the wiring is super-neat, the signal caps are high-quality WIMAs; this thing really has been put together properly. More than that, this is one of those amps that sounds right wherever the simple Volume and Tone controls are set – in fact, you'd struggle to get a bad sound out of it at all.

At lower levels the tone has a pure, chimey quality, combining the textured midrange of a classic EL84-driven amp with the glassier sheen of a '60s or '70s Fender. The sound is very detailed, with variations in pick angle or playing position easy to discern, and it allows the voice of the guitar to come through rather than swamping everything with the weight of its sonic personality. As with tweed-style amps, the Tone control has an influence on the gain; with Volume cranked the GTA 15 becomes a fierce, snarling thing, but rolling back the Tone control keeps things on the right side of playability – and it reacts really well to guitar volume manipulation too. We're so impressed by this amp. We love the combination of British-flavoured power stage with the papery rasp and the treble sheen of the Jensen speaker. It sounds delicious with a guitar plugged straight in, interacts well with a pedalboard, and becomes a sonic chameleon when you drive it with a digital modeller. With a low, low price thanks to direct distribution, this one is a no-brainer.

15W 1x10" all-valve combo

PRICE **£319**
CONTACT **0753 442 9269**
www.yerasov.co.uk

MARSHALL
SL5 Slash Signature

The SL5, endorsed by everyone's fave top-hatted rocker, costs a fair bit for a 5W amp – but if you look on it as a proper, fully-featured combo that just happens to have a low wattage rating, it begins to make a lot more sense. First, it has three preamp valves plus a single EL34 – the valve that has become almost synonymous with the 'Marshall sound'. There are two channels, clean and overdrive, and both channels share the same tone controls. Unusually, the SL5 is also equipped with digital reverb, and there are two inputs, hi and lo, plus a rear panel switch to knock the output right down to one watt. Plug in a Les Paul, and a righteous rock sound is there straight away. The SL5 is less about the '70s and more about the '80s and beyond – it's a crunchy, grinding plug-and-play amp. The clean channel gives warm, fulsome cleans if required, and it sounds fine especially with reverb, but that's not really why we're here: it's the dirty side that's the key, and this amp will pump out definitive Marshall bite on everything from bluesy overdrive to heavy rock to blistering gain. Now for this kind of money you could easily buy a more giggable amp in terms of power, but rock players will find everything they could ask for in a low-wattage Marshall valve amp in the SL5, and the tone is good enough for the studio as well as the home.

The SL5 Slash Signature is a bonsai Marshall combo with warm cleans and an overdrive side that can move from heavy rock to blistering gain

Oversized low-wattage rocker

PRICE **£589**
CONTACT **Marshall**
01908 375411
www.marshallamps.com

VOX
Mini 5 Rhythm

The Vox Mini 5 contains features that would have seemed like science fiction when that battery-powered buskers' favourite the Escort amp bowed out in 1983. It's a modelling amp with 11 settings covering US classics and UK-voiced sounds. Controls include Gain, Tone and Volume, and a three-way power switch gives 0.1W, 1.5W and 5W settings. There are also eight effects, all taken from the Valvetronix series, including compression, modulation, delay and reverb – with tap tempo included. And there's more: this baby is also stuffed with a reasonably effective drum machine, with 99 rhythm presets and nine variations for each of the 11 categories... oh, and there's an onboard tuner, too.

A weeny solid-state amp with a six-inch speaker will never sound huge, but the Vox does a decent job. All the amp models have distinct tonal characteristics, though the lower-gain ones are the most successful, as the lairy amp sounds get a bit fizzy. The effects are quite impressive, with lush reverbs and decent-sounding echoes; the modulation effects are full and powerful, with chorus morphing into a vibrato-style wobble as you ramp up the intensity, while the flanger swooshes like crazy. It'll never cope with even a moderate-volume rehearsal, but this is a very portable practice amp with a wide variety of tones and effects, and if you factor in the rhythm machine, the option of mains power or battery power giving almost 20 hours of playing time, the mic input and enough volume to drown out any acoustic guitar, then the Mini 5 is a tempting little item.

This highly portable mains/battery practice combo comes with 11 amp models, eight effects, a drum machine and a mic input

Compact box of digital tricks

PRICE **£131.99**
CONTACT **Korg UK, 01908 304601**
www.voxamps.com

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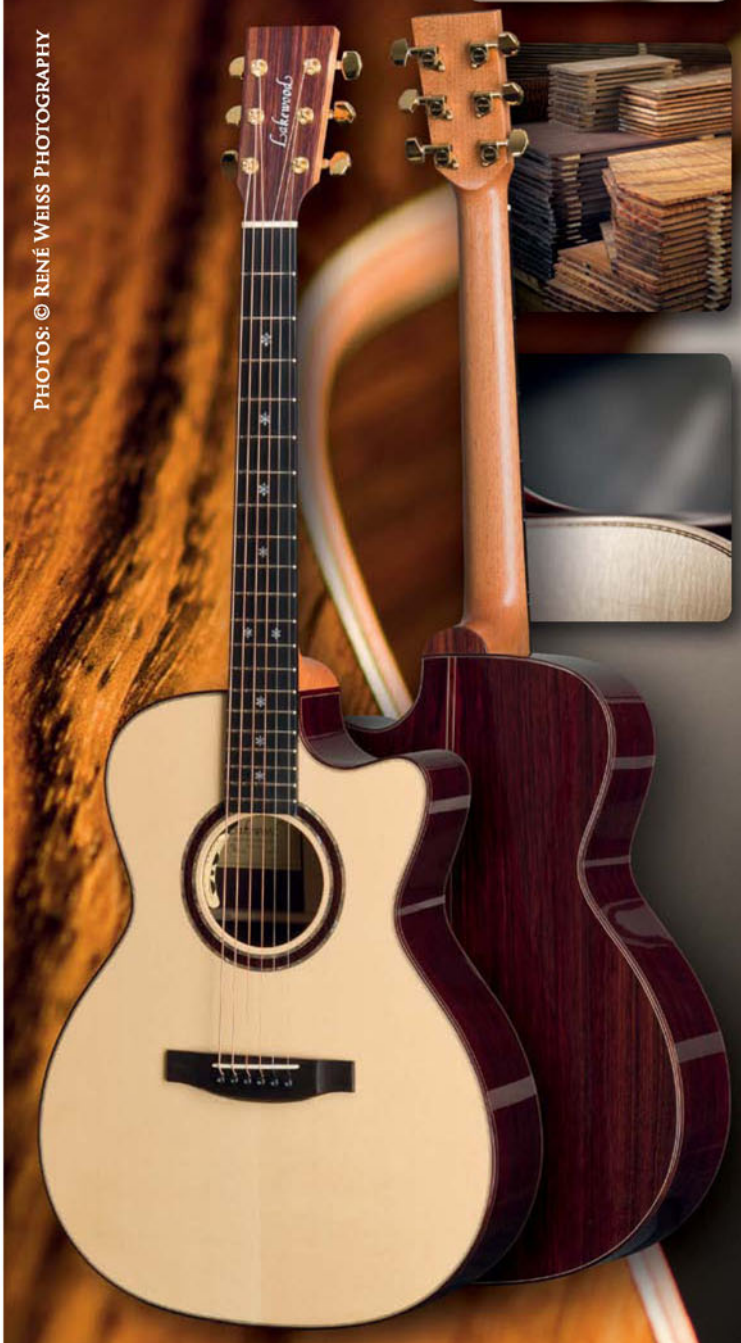

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REVIEWED
OCTOBER
25/01

TWO-ROCK
Studio Pro Plus

The majority of high-end amps these days seem to fall into one of two camps: vintage remakes awash with echoes of the past, or multi-channel monsters for gain addicts. The Studio Pro Plus is neither. Essentially it's a 22W twin 6V6 combo with a single 12" Celestion G12-65 and tremolo and reverb, but behind that it's a refined, sophisticated, and intriguing amp.

You'll need to spend a little time to discover all its capabilities. There's a Contour control to fine-tune the high end and mids, for instance, as well as an Expansion circuit which also controls the mids but smooths the trebles and adds gain too. If that's not enough, there's also a Pickup Loading feature to vary the impedance relationship between your guitar and the first gain stage. Of course it's got a full EQ – together with yet another midrange-altering feature, this time on a switch – and separate Gain and Master controls. The way that all these many, many options interact allows access to everything from clean funk and jazz to big, bold blackface-style clarity to meaty low-gain blues righteousness to thick, throaty overdrives and it's all of sufficient quality to cause fans of the much-hyped holy grail Dumble amp to put their backs out by grabbing for their wallets too fast. You won't get seething stadium sustain at low levels – the Two-Rock needs to get its output tubes hot to reach that point – but its smoothness and richness impresses at any level, and the quality of the tremolo and reverb only adds to the versatility. So, this isn't a cork-sniffing tweed replica, it isn't a balls-out rock amp... but it's a very adaptable and characterful combo, and if you ears have been left wanting in the past then this just might be the answer you've been waiting for.

Super-adaptable mid-size combo

PRICE: **£2099**
CONTACT: **Coda Music**
01438 350815
www.two-rock.com

GARTONE
Regal 1863c

A high five is owed to the person who decided to retire his vintage Voxes and Marshalls and commission Gartone to come up with an amp which could perform the job of both. This 36W head – which is switchable, and extremely convincingly too, down to 18W or 9W – uses four EL84s. It's got pentode/triode modes, solid state/valve rectifier, and two channels – but they're not switchable without an A/B box; this is old-school, man. Heck, even the master volume is defeatable.

Insert guitar, go. Channel 1 is pure, sparkly, nostalgic Voxiness; Channel 2 is crunchy, Plexi-toned goodness through and through, and the Vibe knob – actually a negative feedback control – adds top end and gain for even more fun. With lots and lots of volume on tap, great tones all over the dials and fabulous build quality on the inside, this handwired UK amp is a force to be reckoned with. If nailing vintage Vox and Marshall-type tones sounds like your thing – or even creating your own great-British-amp-which-was-never-made – then you'd be rather more than remiss in not considering the Gartone.

REVIEWED JUNE 24/09

AC30 meets JTM and JMP

PRICE **£1795**
CONTACT **Gartone Amps, 07796 682530**
www.gartoneamps.co.uk

With lots of volume and great tones, this handwired amp is a force to be reckoned with

ORANGE
Custom Shop 50 Head

There are Oranges and there are Oranges, and this is the real deal – completely hand-wired to boutiquey standards in the UK, a hefty hunk of potency with enormous knobs, the famous graphic symbols and the retina-scorching tolex. It's a twin EL34 head knocking out 50W in Class AB but switchable down to a still-serious 30W in Class A. It sounds, in a word, Orange: big, loud and solid, with a strong, oaky 'clonk' in the midrange and plenty of clarity at the top. By 10 or 11 o'clock on the preamp dial you're out of clean territory for good, and anything past noon is properly, deliciously saturated. Flip to Class A for more sparkle and chime, or stick with AB for thumpy, meaty riffing.

Orange is calling this 'the definitive British rock amp', and if you wanted to argue then you might be struggling for hard evidence. There are less expensive Oranges that sound close, but there's a genuine raising of the bar here, and it's all about subtlety. The Custom Shop 50 doesn't offer a wide palette of sounds to choose from; it has one authoritatively glorious voice, and the controls provide an array of highly refined adjustments to its distinctive accent.

REVIEWED JULY 24/10

Vitamin C for rock lovers

PRICE **£1699**
CONTACT **Orange Amps, 020 8905 2828**
www.orangeamps.com

The Custom Shop 50 doesn't offer a palette of sounds: it's all about one glorious voice

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BOGNER
Ecstasy Red

REVIEWED MARCH 24/06

Tripping the scarlet fantastic

PRICE **£249**
CONTACT **GuitarGuitar, 0800 456 1959**
www.guitarguitar.co.uk

While many guitar players desire Bogner amps, the ideal of a pedal offering some of the flavour and flexibility for a fraction of the cost has obvious appeal. Like its Blue compatriot, the Ecstasy Red pedal is modelled on the front end of Bogner's most famous amp. The Red concentrates on the amp's higher-gain Red channel, designed with five class A gain stages. It certainly sounds fantastic, delivering dozens of expressive lead tones and crunchy chord voices that punch their way though rock, blues, grunge and classic metal. Between the Mode, Pre-EQ and Structure switches you have nine tone/gain presets, so the options are vast even before you start tweaking the independent tone controls. The only thing the pedal won't do is a hi-gain scooped mids nu-metal brogue. The Red can generate a significant amount of background noise, but you're unlikely to notice this when used in anger. This pedal is classy, sounds great, and contributes to the character and feel of your playing in a very naturalistic way. If you're happy with your rig but want some Bogner-style soloing mojo, the Red with its palate of jaw-dropping options will do the job nicely.

AMPTWEAKER
Tight Fuzz

Stomp in its pomp

PRICE **£169**
CONTACT **Sounds Great, 0161 436 4799**
www.soundsgreatmusic.com

Amptweaker head honcho James Brown is great at asking players what they want – and then giving it to them. For a relatively simple pedal, there's a huge amount of sonic potential in the Tight Fuzz. It's best treated as a variable coloured boost that can be precisely cranked to give you all sorts of subtle playing effects. A lot of classic fuzz pedals lack nuance, but this one works brilliantly as a tool for just tipping your clean guitar sound over the edge, thanks to an unusually subtle Fuzz control. For example, you can change sonic character by switching transistor types. Germanium transistors were used in classic '60s pedals, and the '60s switch goes all the way from Hendrix-era to buzzy Keef riffs. Selecting silicon delivers a hint more gain and a smoother distortion tail. Overall, this is as highly usable and very musical pedal. For subtle boosts, edge-of-breakup and classic full-on meltdown the Amptweaker Tight Fuzz is the business. It really needs to be experienced and it offers a whole lot for the money.

REVIEWED OCTOBER 25/01

BLACKSTAR
LT-Drive

REVIEWED NOVEMBER 25/02

Get your motor running

PRICE **£49**
CONTACT **Blackstar 01604 652 844**
www.blackstaramps.co.uk

Blackstar's latest series of compact pedals proves once again that this company isn't just all about amplifiers. The LT-Drive has a massive gain range on tap, but it's also capable of cleaning right up to perform as a high-quality boost. You can easily dial in some thick, chewy midrange, while at the other sonic extreme the LT-Drive dishes up some very heavy overdrive tones with smooth, effortless sustain and a pleasing degree of note bloom for soloing. As the gain levels increase the midrange becomes fatter and smoother and the dynamic response also changes as the compression increases, but the LT-Drive always manages to retain clarity and note definition. It's a raunchy and recognisable tone that will suit blues and classic rock players and one which works well with both single coils and humbuckers. The LT-Drive impresses us greatly, and It's a surprise that Blackstar has priced it so low. This pedal's build and sound quality matches anything available at the price, and we expect it to sell by the bucketload.

CARL MARTIN
Plexitone

Single-channel sonics

PRICE **£159**
CONTACT **First Line Dist, 01626 853876**
www.carlmartin.com

Yes, there are a whole lot of high-quality overdrive pedals out there, but that doesn't lessen the joy of discovering another one. Given the success of the original Carl Martin PlexiTone pedal, this new version had a lot to live up to. Apart from the improvements in the simplified layout, the new version allows you to use a standard 9V supply. Soundwise, we get the impression we're dealing with top-notch wizardry; the PlexiTone responds wonderfully to playing dynamics and volume changes, allowing you to use your plectrum to control the gain, moving seamlessly from a very slightly crunchy tone through to a growl. An amp-like 'feel' can sell us on a pedal, and the PlexiTone has that character in spades. If you want to cover a range of sounds from classic crunch through to hard rock, then this one will fill that gap and perform extremely well.

EHX
Deluxe Bass Big Muff Pi

Guitar Awards 2013 Best Bass Effects

Larger-than-life bass tone

PRICE **£109**
CONTACT **ricks@ehx.com**
www.ehx.com

The original Big Muff Pi was an unexpected hit with bassists just as much as guitar players, and this latest version of the bass-centric Big Muff family is a welcome addition. Among the new features we liked is the Crossover section, which allows you to combine controls to dictate exactly how fat or muddy the bottom end is and how snarling and aggressive you want your top end. In terms of distortion, there's lots of good stuff to be had: Tone and Sustain at 12 o'clock is thick and gnarly with hints of the classic '70s fuzz of the *Roobarb And Custard* theme. Push Tone into treble boost (clockwise) for a thinner buzzsaw sound or rotate Sustain for an explosion of white noise. Nudge Tone to the bass side and you're in early Sabbath *N.I.B.* territory, huge in size and catastrophic in impact. The Deluxe Bass Big Muff Pi is a fine bass distortion pedal. The basic version's great, too... but a mere extra £20 buys you the Deluxe with its near-essential Blend and Gate features. It's real Deluxe livin'.

EHX
Epitome

Sail the sonic seas

PRICE **£299**
CONTACT **ricks@ehx.com**
www.ehx.com

Famous for its classic stompboxes of the 1970s, Electro-Harmonix has begun to develop clever and imaginative multi-FX units that combine selected solo units in a single frame. The Epitome boasts three sections based on the Holy Grail Plus (a reverb/delay), Electric Mistress (the famous flanger/chorus), and one of our all-time favourites, the Micro POG (a bonkers polyoctave generator). Time spent with the Epitome will be well-rewarded, as it almost begs you to tinker with its controls and really experiment with your sound. Slapback echoes, ambient delays, White Stripes-like tones... all these and a lorryload more can be yours. If you want to just plant your foot down and get instant traditional sounds, mind, the Epitome may well not be for you. It's a brave guitarist that introduces these way-out colours into their palette, but they'll be all the richer for it. There's so much fun and so many hours of noodling to be had here, especially if you're a rhythm-based player. The price isn't cheap, granted – but we'd gladly pay it for the Holy Grail and Micro POG sections alone.

LINE 6
POD Floor HD500X

More to the floor

PRICE **£429**
CONTACT **Line 6, 01788 566 566**
www.line6.com

The POD brand has achieved its legendary status through impressive attention to sonic detail, and the Line 6 Pod HD500X is perhaps the pinnacle of this so far as it boasts the ability to produce consistently excellent tones whether played into an amp, mixing desk, or computer DAW. It boasts significantly more that its predecessor, so those who wish to create elaborate landscapes can live less in fear of the 'DSP Limit reached' message. If you primarily play live and want a simpler unit, we'd suggest the Line 6 M1; for those with home studios, a POD HD. But if your needs are wider, and you're willing to commit the time to get the best out this complex unit, then the HD500X is an intriguing proposition for any sonic adventurer.

Alvarez

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MESA/BOOGIE
Throttle Box

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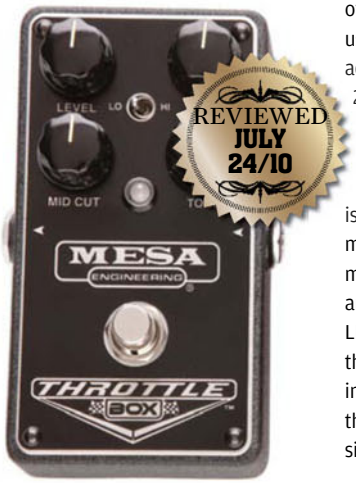
PRICE **£189**
CONTACT **Westside Distribution**
0141 248 4812, www.mesaboogie.com

Having decided that the time is right to enter the compact stompbox arena, Mesa/Boogie didn't disappoint. For us the pick of the pops from the new releases is the Throttle Box. Boasting classy, understated looks, this overdrive/distortion pedal can give you everything from classic rock to modern metal with a fair amount of ease. If you want over the top it's happy to oblige, but you can rein it in enough to deliver some modern blues tones when they're called for. This pedal certainly delivers sound-wise, courtesy of usefully effective and wide-ranging controls, while build quality is up to the equally high standard expected of Mesa/Boogie products. The Throttle Box is very much like a Boogie in a box. The asking price isn't cheap, but it's less than those charged for many more amateurish 'boutique-style' stompboxes – and the money buys Mesa/Boogie-style professional performance plus looks to match, which is a winning combination.



REVIEWED JULY 24/10

MORLEY
Buffer Boost

REVIEWED AUGUST 24/11

One for the chain gang

PRICE **£87**
CONTACT **Westside Distribution**
0141 248 4812, www.mesaboogie.com

US pedal specialists Morley have come out with a simple but effective buffer, a good method of maintaining signal quality when using several stompboxes. In addition, they've included up to 20dB of controllable clean boost, tailor-made for solo work. Having established where to insert the Buffer Boost, operation is simplicity itself, matching the pedal's minimalist approach and image. The Power LED proves useful, as there's no noise to indicate operation, while the Boost function is similarly silent, with slight hiss apparent only at maximum. With Level at about a third, output matches the bypass volume and then progressively increases as the control is advanced. Depending on the partner effects, the Buffer Boost can offer sonic improvements ranging from subtle to significant. Morley's unassuming unit should prove a real asset; the variable boost is a bonus, supplying anything from a slight increase in volume to the hefty extra amount available at maximum. The end result is an appealing combination of two simple but effective features.

MXR
Bass Chorus Deluxe

REVIEWED APRIL 24/07

Chorus of approval

PRICE **£179**
CONTACT **Westside Distribution**
0141 248 4812, www.jimdunlop.com

This compact pedal possesses all the winning design and functional aesthetic MXR has been known and loved for over the years. With all the internal machinations fired by analog bucket brigade technology rather than digital processing, this stompbox supplies old-school charm for the modern musician. It takes care of your chorus/flanger needs efficiently and in an easy-to-operate manner. We were also impressed by the fact that, as is often the case with cheaper pedals of this nature, it stays silent when you don't play. That's right; not even the hint of a 'whoosh.' This MXR bass pedal is well-thought out and highly musical. It's easy to access top-notch chorus or flanger modulations with a minimum of fuss, and the X-Over feature keeps the low end in tune and helps make it very multi-purpose. As with all MXRs the price approaches the upper end of affordability, but you get what you pay for. Highly recommended.

PIGTRONIX
Quantum Time Modulator

REVIEWED NOVEMBER 25/02

Holy hybrid!

PRICE **£159**
CONTACT **Musicpsych, 020 7607 6005**
www.pigtronix.com

This combination pedal combines chorus and vibrato, and there's plenty of cleverness going on inside the innocent-looking, attractively-finished metal case. If messing around with the concept of time is your idea of hog heaven (sorry), you're in for a treat. The Quantum Time Modulator is a superb little pedal, and the classy tones and responsive controls make it one you just keep coming back to. At its more sedate settings the unit adds body and a touch of mysterious flavour to a straight tone which would make any indie, rock, metal or blues player instantly sound more interesting. The wilder side might be too much for many, but for those who want to experiment with textured drone notes or avant garde lead lines, the QTM will prove a fascinating inspiration. Pigtronix does it again.

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PRICE **£250**
CONTACT **Rotosound, 01732 450838**
www.rotosound.com

When the original Rotosound Fuzz came out, it was a rare bird – but of the limited number produced, one of them found its way to a certain Jimmy Page (you might have heard of him). This reissue came about as a consequence of a conversation between company chairman Jason How and an American fan. All we can do is thank them both, and pedal guru Dr Barry R Pyatt – the man responsible for the design built around the core tone-generating elements. Simply put, this is a great pedal. The Rotosound Fuzz combines beautifully with amp tremolo and varying degrees of valve distortion to conjure proper classic guitar magic. Germanium fuzz has found a niche in just about every genre of music since it was invented, so there's no doubt that you'll open up plenty of vintage territory... while claiming some of your own vistas at the same time.

REVIEWED MARCH 24/06

SHARPTONE
WEM Rush Pep Box

REVIEWED JANUARY 24/04

Nice bit of wedge

PRICE **£185**
CONTACT **Sharptone FX, 01271 325896**
www.sharptonefx.com

Fuzz lovers are currently revelling in a slew of reissues of obscure and wonderful '60s freak-out devices, and the Pepbox is a particularly interesting one. It was designed by an engineer called Pepe Rush and manufactured by WEM of Copicat tape delay fame, going through various updates including germanium and silicon tranny versions – but crucially, at one point, Beatle power stepped in. John Lennon was pictured with a WEM Rush Pepbox in 1966, and though it's hard to be sure which recordings he used it on, if any, the association is enough to have kept the name of this lesser-spotted fuzz legend alive for almost half a century. And here, at long last, is the official reissue. This metal-wedge has been licensed to Sharptone, a boutique operation based in Devon – and it's a fine unit indeed. You don't need to be a retro-obsessed mojo-hunter or indeed a Beatles fan to appreciate a really nice fuzz, and that's exactly what the WEM Rush Pepbox is. The tone will hit the mark no matter which decade you're aiming at; the looks, the quirkiness and the Charlie Watkins factor are just a bonus.

TC ELECTRONIC
Ditto Looper

Simple and effective

PRICE **£105**
CONTACT **TC Electronic**
www.tcelectronic.com

As much as we like 'em, loopers can be darn fiddly beasts... but we have to admit that our first thoughts when we saw that Ditto Looper was that TC Electronic had overdone the simplifying. On further inspection, we're happy to admit we were wrong. The one switch, one knob layout inevitably means you need to familiarise yourself with the basic functions, but it doesn't take long. Most importantly, what goes in comes back out – clean and without distortion or noise. Maybe you've toyed with the idea of buying a looper but you've been turned off by the complexity, size or price. The TC Electronic Ditto Looper avoids those issues, and it's so tiny that there will be space for it on most boards. But be warned: loopers are addictive, and it's easy to lose hours or even days of your life in a cycle of behaviour that's hard to break.

REVIEWED MAY 24/08

XOTIC
Bass RC Booster

REVIEWED MARCH 24/06

Just the right level

PRICE **£169**
CONTACT **Bass Direct, 01926 886433**
www.bassdirect.co.uk

This LA company started making effects back in 1999, and this high-quality handwired unit is a welcome addition to the ranks. It's a transparent-sounding level booster aimed specifically at bass players with a simple two-band EQ offering 15dB of cut or boost, so you can either match the pedal's output to your amp or set it to the best boost level for you. The Xotic RC Booster solves the problem of using a mixture of active and passive instruments on the same gig, and does so without changing the inherent tonal characteristics of your instrument – unless you choose to add a bit of simple EQ, that is, and even then it seems to enhance rather than re-model the sound. This Bass RC Booster is the kind of pedal that you don't know you need until after it's been added to your collection... and then you'll probably wonder how you ever got by without it.

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REVIEWED NOVEMBER 25/02

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CONTACT **Fender GBI, 01342 331300**
www.fender.com

In recent years there has been something of a proliferation in the number of Fender basses available to the eager punter but the '50s Precision is an especially handsome contender. The feature that really draws the eye is the gold anodised pickguard, a spot-on period detail from 1957 to 1959, although this usage didn't last long as the original aluminium versions rapidly became blotchy and discoloured by sweat. It looks cool, though, and we're assured this modern repro is made of much sterner and more sweat-resistant stuff.

The pickup on the '50s P-Bass is what it's all about, and this is a really good-sounding one. Wind the tone control right up and the reward is a fat bottom end with pleasing growl that combines plenty of aggressive intent with excellent clarity. This earthy feel is supported by a midrange that's clean and even, while erring on the darker, low-mid side for just enough stature and impact – a nice big tone with plenty of punch. Though the well-realised highs have always contributed to the Precision's clear-speaking character, they're nowhere near explosive and even feel a little compressed if you really lay into the D and G strings – but they're certainly not brittle, having plenty of substance and practicality. As always, backing off the tone induces a more polite sound with blurred edges, creating a sound that feels progressively more controlled. The '50s Precision is a shining new light in the Fender range... classic in looks, extremely playable, and a fine tribute to its forebear.

WARWICK
RockBass Star Bass

REVIEWED NOVEMBER 25/02

Hatful of semi-hollow

PRICE **£789**
CONTACT **Warwick UK, 0161 839 0666**
www.warwickbass.com

Warwick's RockBass Star Bass is a fine addition to the burgeoning roster of hollowbody and semi-hollowbody instruments. 'Balance' is the watchword with the Star Bass both in form and function. Sitting down it's pretty stable on your lap, and when you plug in you'll be happy to discover a fairly even output level across all three pickup settings. Stylistically this sound comfortably works for a cross-section of rock, pop and contemporary soul – any genre, really, where old-school bottom takes precedence over toppiness. Flicking the selector switch from centre to the 'up' position solos the neck pickup, producing an earthy sound. This setting is a great starting point for traditionally-inclined bass work such as blues or old-school country. The bridge pickup is brighter and snappier but this doesn't equate to brittle and impractical, and there's plenty of body to the notes no matter how high you roam up the fingerboard. The asking price of nigh-on £800 puts it right at the very top end of the 'affordable' bracket, but it's a well put-together bass with great stage presence that allows you to cope with a wide musical spectrum. The decent balance married to a supremely playable neck makes for a highly pleasurable experience. Well worth a look.

The Star Bass has balance, playability, stage presence and old-school sounds

TRABEN
Array Standard Bass

REVIEWED MARCH 24/06

Actively economical

PRICE **£299**
CONTACT **Rosetti, 01376 550033**
www.rosetti.co.uk

The year's model from Traben is below what many consider to be the magic £300 mark. Unlike its ancestor, the Array Limited, the Standard model has dumped the massively oversized 'sustain-enhancing' bridge (although the one that remains is still pretty sizeable) and have also done away with the excessive chrome detail found on most other models. The styling concept may be more conservative compared to other Traben basses, but the overall effect gets a big thumbs up: Traben has produced a cool instrument with a well-designed active side. The basic sound is evenly loaded with decent bass response, reasonably even midrange and enough treble to bring out some overtones and a pleasing edge on the lower strings. The fact that this modern-looking bass doesn't have modern nasal high-mids is rather refreshing. The neck pickup has an earthy sound with more focus on the bass end, softer note edges and less of a feeling of detail, while the bridge pickup has a nice, tight bottom end. When you go for the twin-pickup setting you'll find it's fat without being too overpowering; the definition is tighter and cleaner, with a snappier top end available from a little treble boost. At less than £300, this bass is brilliant value for money. In short, with the Array Standard, Traben has added another serious contender to the roster of budget active instruments out there.

With good active electronics, the Traben Array Standard is brilliant value for under £300

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The original Ampeg B-15 Portaflex is the most sought-after and widely recorded bass amp in history. The flip-top cabs and double-baffle design have been revolutionary since the early '60s and they're still badass today. With the Heritage B-15N, you can have this classic design in a superbly authentic reissue. Need some more power? Explore a modern take on the Ampeg classic with the new Portaflex Series. Choose from three different high-wattage lightweight heads, two different flip-top cabs or the versatile ported extension cabs. Mix-and-match to create the ultimate Ampeg Portaflex. Genuine Ampeg tone in your own custom configuration.

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ampeg.com

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REVIEWED
JUNE
24/09

GB GUITARS
SPITFIRE 4-STRING

Flying the flag

PRICE: **£2200**
CONTACT: **GB Guitars, 01273 220055**
www.gbguitars.co.uk

Bernie Goodfellow began building basses in a shed at the bottom of his garden in Forest Hill in London almost 30 years ago. Now happily ensconced in Brighton, GB guitars is flourishing – and the Spitfire four-string is just one of the jewels in the GB range. Ordering a GB means you can have your bass built from whatever woods you desire, with options ranging from LEDs to a built-in tuner to the Kick Drum, a programmable metronome with bass drum sound. The choice of humbuckers or single coils is yours as well, and the mini toggle can select your favourite EQ setting.

With a birdseye maple neck and an ash body, the Spitfire is one of the more trad-leaning GB models. Though inspired by the Jazz Bass it's no reproduction, with a stylised, forward-leaning stance, thinner, elongated horns and a deep cutaway. The Spitfire has a solid bottom end with a satisfying growl and a zingy edge. The highs are a little snappy, but also clean and cutting. Turn to the neck pickup and the Spitfire becomes softer and less punchy – just the ticket for fitting in with a band – while the bridge pickup is rich and burpy. Engaging the EQ in any mode is a lot of fun: crank up the Bass knob and your trouser legs are flapping, while the middle control allows a defined, well-shaped sound with low-end growl from the neck pickup, some funky, warmed-up punch at the bridge, and extra low-end aggro with both pickups on. This bass is a superb example of the man's craft. Obviously, buying a handmade bass involves a big financial commitment, but if you buy a GB you'll be get a bass which you'll treasure and adore. That alone is worth a good sum of money.

SANDBERG

Basic Ken Taylor 20th Anniversary

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 24/12

Five-string goodness

PRICE **£1530**
CONTACT **Synergy Distribution, 0121 270 6485**
www.synergydistribution.co.uk

Back in the '90s bassist Ken Taylor was looking for a reliable workhorse bass. Sandberg supremo Holger Stonjek came up with a concept to make Taylor's dream come true – a design that he describes as a mix between a Music Man and a Precision. After months of testing different pickup positions via a prototype with pickups fitted onto a rail that Taylor nudged back and forth until he found his sweet spots, the Basic Ken Taylor model was born. Two decades later, Sandberg presents a fitting tribute to the original flagship five-string bass. Even with Treble on maximum, no matter what mode you choose, you get plenty of cut and bite, but no fizzing, crystalline highs. In humbucking mode there's a controlled feel to the BKT's tone, and if you decide to dig in you'll produce a throatier growl. Single-coil mode can deliver silky tones and pleasing pop/rock tones. We've always been fans of Sandberg at *G&B*, and the BKT is a well-balanced, versatile instrument with plenty of easily accessible tonal variations. But, in some ways most importantly, with the BKT you're getting a high-quality, well spec'd, handmade bass for a smidgeon over £1500. Good news, indeed.

The BKT is a well-balanced, versatile instrument – a high-quality handmade bass for just over £1500

KAY

Vintage Reissue Pro Bass

REVIEWED SEPTEMBER 24/12

Jaunty low-end charm

PRICE **£1099**
CONTACT **Cranes Music, 029 2093 8215**
www.cranesmusicstore.com

There's been a recent upsurge in interest in Kays of the '50s and '60s, especially since luthier Roger Fitz – a long-time Kay fan and previously a producer of quality replicas using his own company, Fritz Brothers Guitars – hopped on board in 2007. Back in the day the Vintage Reissue Pro was originally called the K162, an instrument that was highly regarded by blues bassists from the Chicago area. Though there's no f-hole, this is a semi-hollowbody with two chambers on either side of a central block that runs between the pickup and the bridge, leaving room for a third, smaller chamber underneath the tailpiece. The Kay's body is 70mm deep, which can take a little time to get used to if you've spent your bass-playing life with say, a Fender Jazz.

But it's well worth the effort; fitted with flatwound strings, the Kay's acoustic-biased tone has plenty of warm, natural lows. If you're looking for serious growl, go elsewhere – but we were very taken with the space-filling rumble the Kay Pro can deliver. Does it sound exactly like an upright bass? No, but it's a viable and definitely acoustically-biased option when that particular feel is required. It's also very comfortable to play thanks to the thin neck and short scale. This Kay is a splendid 'character' bass, possessing a unique flavour to have at your disposal – especially if your musical bag encompasses folk, country or blues.

The Kay's acoustic-biased tone has a space-filling rumble and plenty of warm, natural lows

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PJB
Double Four Bass Combo

The modern trend for downsizing and weight reduction in bass amps is something that should be applauded by all bass players, and Phil Jones Bass is one of the companies at the forefront of developments with its Briefcase and Bass Cub models. PJB's 70W Double Four combo is the latest addition to this excellent line. If you have any preconceptions about the quality or size of tone you'll get from this little belter with its two four-inch speakers, then cast them adrift right now. If you're expecting ear-splitting volume and earth-shaking bass response, forget that too – but you can expect a good reproduction of your bass's sound with the qualities you'd expect from a bigger amp. Active bass players may not need recourse to the EQ, so the key is a little care in setting the input level: flick it to High and start somewhere near nine o'clock and your tone will be clean and natural-sounding, right down to the B string if fitted. The quality of sound is amazing. If you do involve the EQ you'll be staggered at how much low end the PJB's added low-frequency radiator can reproduce – it's like having a concealed extension cab. Boosting Mid makes things punchy and refreshingly un-nasal, and pushing Treble gets you cut and bite. Elsewhere, the Aux section with its level control works well, giving a clean reproduction of backing tracks. The fact that a combo this small can give you a clean, full-range sound with real depth is brilliant, but it's the output level and quality of tone that really make this a very impressive little unit. The price looks high but when you compare it to similarly spec'd competition it's very reasonable, and while it doesn't come loaded with effects the Double Four's combination of tonal quality and portability is unbeatable.

More decibels than kilograms

PRICE: **£399**
CONTACT: **Synergy Distribution 0121 270 6485, www.synergydistribution.co.uk**

ASHDOWN
CTM-15 15W Tube Bass Amp

REVIEWED OCTOBER 25/01

This latest offering from Mark Gooday's company is a compact and very retro-looking head that boasts one ECC83 at the preamp and two EL84 valves on the output. A good place to start is with all the EQ knobs and the Master at halfway, and Gain about a quarter. This produces a sound with just a little grit that's warm, with a beautifully even response, plus growling lows and a punchy midrange. There's a bright sheen and plenty of bite, and it's a great instant live sound... in fact, this setting is so pleasing that you probably won't want to go anywhere else in a tonal sense, other than via your instrument's tone controls. However, you can get more thud by cutting Treble and Middle and boosting Bass to the full, and more punch and stature by similarly isolating Middle, although maximum Treble produces a wiry tone where you hear every fret and position shift.

As well as being cute, the CTM-15 is an excellent-sounding amp. Adaptability is not the aim here; it's all about getting a great fundamental tone. Ashdown markets this as a recording device, and though the CTM-15 is a fine way of getting a classy valve sound for little outlay, it's could also prove more than loud enough for some rehearsals, small gigs or live situations where the PA takes the strain. It may not end up being your main workhorse amp, but this wee beauty from Ashdown may just be the one you have the most fun with.

With a great fundamental tone, the CTM-15 is a fine way of getting a classy valve sound for little outlay

Recording amp with a retro lean

PRICE **£350**
CONTACT **Ashdown, 01245 441155**
www.ashdownmusic.com

AMPEG
Portaflex PF-800

REVIEWED AUGUST 24/11

From '60s soul to classic rock, the name of Portaflex is hallowed in the world of bass amplification. Ampeg first got busy reworking those original low-wattage flip-top valve amps with the Class D powered PF-350 and PF-500, but this latest model ups the ante by socking out an impressive 800W into a four-ohm load, which certainly is one whole lot of mash for your moolah. Hooking the amp up to a matching PF-210HE cab, you'll soon discover that it's easy to get a good sound; just set all the controls at 12 o'clock, tweak Gain sensibly to keep the MOSFET preamp in check and disable the tweeter, and you're good to go. The 800 doesn't colour your midrange; with a flat EQ setting it sounds honky, dark and belligerent on lower strings and clean and musical on the D and G. Engaging Ultra Lo adds a slight fatness while subtly scooping the midrange; bringing in the Hi gives added sheen. The Bass EQ warmly envelopes you like a favourite jumper, and boosting Treble adds a nice freshness without any increase in aural flotsam. On the five-way Frequency control, boosting 220Hz (position 1) tightens the bottom and adds a little more impact – especially effective with boosted Bass – while a hike to 450Hz brings in snap and gurgle. Position 3 (800Hz) is gnarlier with a crisp fingerfunk sound, and the remaining two effectively spring clean the top end, Position 5 adding more crunch. In historical terms this is nothing like the original Portaflex, but that's not the real story; the PF-800 has plenty to offer, and an excellent portability-to-weight ratio, a simple and effective EQ and brilliant value for money all stack up to make this little Ampeg package rather appealing.

We soon discovered that it's easy to get a good sound out of this new Ampeg Portaflex head

A new dawn for the Portaflex

PRICE **£559**
CONTACT **Loud Technology, 01494 557398**
www.ampeg.com

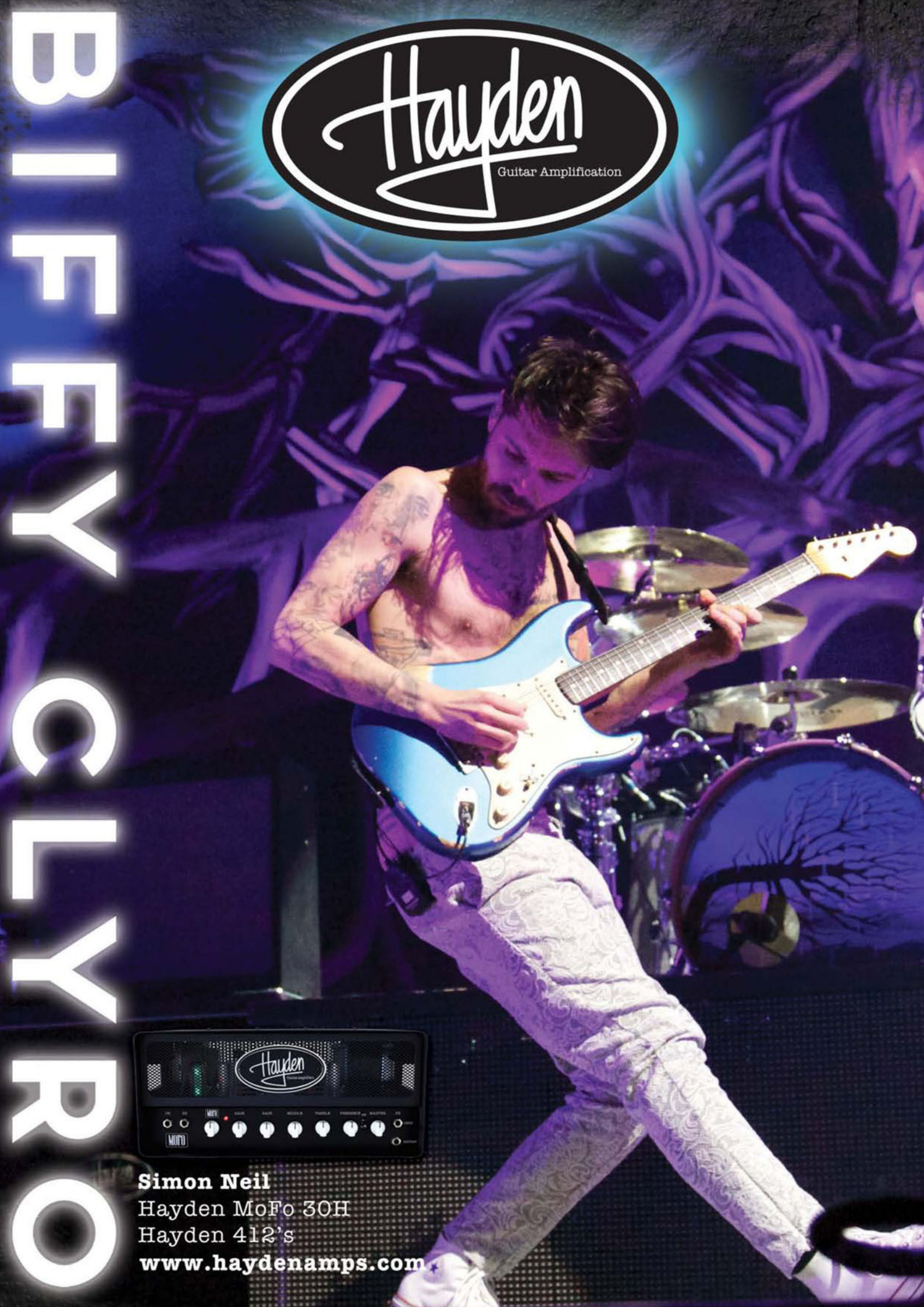
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Photo: Mike Prior

Rockin' Dude

Mick Ralphs is packing his bag in preparation for a much-anticipated outing with the ever-marvellous Mott The Hoople. **Steve Bailey** meets him to chat about his absolute favourite subject - guitars

Tasteful, understated and melodic, Mick Ralphs' six-string contribution to the great rock canon may have been more subtle than that of some, but make no mistake – his influence still resonates. His work with Mott The Hoople and Bad Company marks him out as a master of elegant, ingenious fretwork, and his music remains a staple on the airwaves decades after its inception. This summer he took part in the 40th anniversary Bad Company tour, and in November he will again tread the boards with Mott The Hoople in response to popular demand for their ecstatically-received five-night sell-out reunion run at the Hammersmith Apollo in 2009.

The road hasn't always been so smooth. Back in 1970 Mott The Hoople were a very demoralised outfit. Despite releasing a clutch of fine albums and building a small but utterly devoted cult following, the band were still penniless; 'A Mott gig was like an event, people would go crazy,' Ralphs recalls, 'but we just couldn't sell any records.' The band survived on their burgeoning reputation for frenzied underground live shows where Mick could be heard ripping up a storm on his first Gibson, a mid-'50s P90-loaded Les Paul goldtop, bought with record company advance cash. Yet it was with the sound of another Gibson that Mick's Mott The Hoople career would become synonymous – the boisterous tones of the Les Paul Junior.

'A Mott gig was an event, people would go crazy – but we couldn't sell any records'

'In the days when I first went to America with Mott, you could really find bargains,' explains Mick. 'We were touring with Leslie West around 1970, and he was playing a Junior. It sounded amazing and I thought, that's the sound I want – I've got to get one.'

Money of course was tight, but whenever the schedule allowed Ralphs and assorted Mott bandmates would go out and scour the pawnshops in the rougher parts of town in search of tucked-away treasures. 'I remember going into one pawnshop and saying "How much is that guitar in the window?" – trying to pretend I didn't know it was a Gibson. He said "Oh, the Gibson? A hundred dollars." I couldn't believe my luck. I said "What – $100?" He said "Okay, $75." So the first Mott Junior was $75. Virtually nothing!'

The Junior and the goldtop quickly became the cornerstone of the classic Mott sound. 'For what I was doing, it fitted,' Ralphs considers. 'With Mott I had to get a full sound because Pete Watts, the bass player, wasn't playing with the drummer... he was all over the shop. I had to keep some bottom end, and P90s are great for that fat, roaring sound. I developed a thick, chordy approach to sit with the drums, so everything could go on top of that. I've always been more of a rhythm player than a lead player, really.'

As a bonus Mick found he could supplement his meagre Mott earnings by keeping up a regular transatlantic flow of Les Paul Juniors. 'They were so cheap and so available. We weren't making any money so I'd come back with a Junior or something else, go to Top Gear in Denmark Street, and flog it. The customs didn't stop you in those days!'

Finally things began to look up. Celebrity fan David Bowie helped grab Mott The Hoople a huge hit with his donation of *All The Young Dudes*, while Mick had written a few songs which he knew could be huge – *Can't Get Enough*, *Movin' On* and *Ready For Love*.

Problematically, although Mott singer Ian Hunter liked the new songs, he didn't feel he could really sing them. Then, however, Mick struck up a friendship with ex-Free frontman Paul Rodgers when his band, Peace, toured with Mott. Ralphs played Rodgers his compositions – and the seed of Bad Company

Gear

Guitars

Gibson 2007 Custom Shop chambered Les Paul reissue, 1958 Gibson double-cut Les Paul Junior, 1957 Fender Esquire

Amps

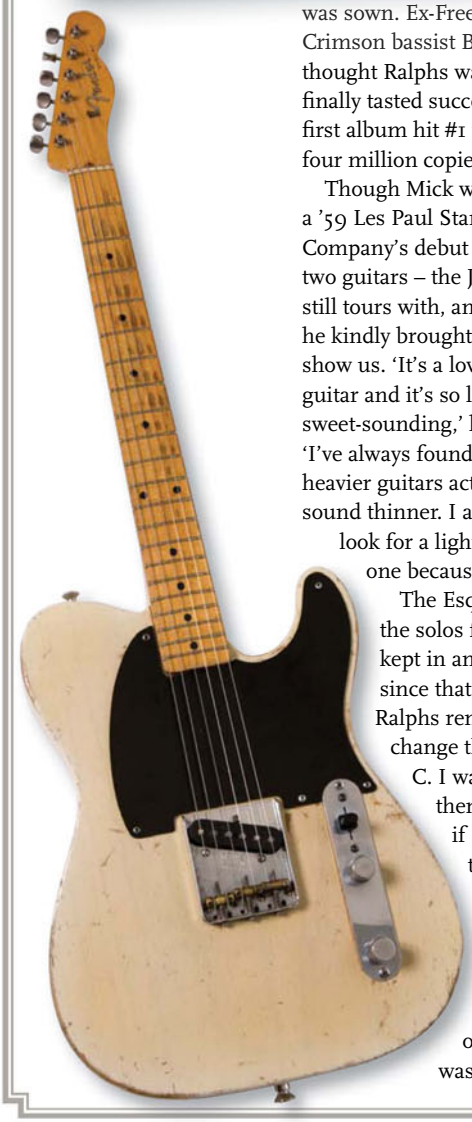
Marshall JCM 900, Marshall 45W Handwired, with straight 4x12" cabs. 'I don't like the angled ones, the bottom one has more wood and I like a nice fat woody guitar sound.'

Effects

None with Mott The Hoople, but an MXR Phaser/Chorus with Bad Company

Mott The Hoople: Verden Allen (keys), Mick Ralphs, Ian Hunter (vocal/guitar), Dale 'Buffin' Giffin (drums), Pete 'Overend' Watts (bass)

Ralphs with his 'sweet sounding' 2007 Custom Shop Les Paul. Below: the *Can't Get Enough* '57 Esquire



was sown. Ex-Free drummer Simon Kirke and King Crimson bassist Boz Burrell soon came on board. Many thought Ralphs was crazy to leave Mott when they'd finally tasted success, but Bad Company's self-titled first album hit #1 in the US in 1974, going on to sell four million copies; it's still a essential classic rock LP.

Though Mick would soon switch from the Junior to a '59 Les Paul Standard in pursuit of clarity, for Bad Company's debut album he depended almost totally on two guitars – the Junior and a 1957 Esquire, a guitar he still tours with, and which he kindly brought along to show us. 'It's a lovely old guitar and it's so light and sweet-sounding,' he says. 'I've always found that heavier guitars actually sound thinner. I always look for a lightweight one because they usually have a sweeter tone.'

> *'The Esquire is a lovely guitar, so sweet sounding. If there was a fire, it's the one I'd grab'*

The Esquire is the guitar you hear on all but the solos from *Can't Get Enough* and it's been kept in an open C tuning pretty much ever since that recording. 'I wrote it in open G,' Ralphs remembers, 'but Paul asked if I could change the key, so it ended up very high, in C. I was tightening the strings waiting for them to ping off! Eventually I figured that if I put 0.009"s on it would just about take it, and it's still tuned to that right now. It's just come off tour and it's still in tune... amazing. It's the one guitar I've held on to all these years. I did think about selling it once to raise some money for something or other, but I'm so glad I didn't. If there was a fire, it's the one guitar I'd grab.'

Mick got through a few '59 sunbursts in his Bad Company days. The image of him with a Les Paul in front of a Marshall endures – but all were sold before prices took off. 'They weren't that expensive in those days and they weren't that highly prized,' he points out. 'I managed to pick one up for about $2000, which I thought was a lot of money. I first played it on the *Straight Shooter* album [Bad Company's second, released in 1975]. In Bad Company I probably had three or four different bursts. They were going for such silly money. I sold the last one to some guy in the States for about $3000 and thought I was doing well. As I sold it I thought, well, I'll never be able to afford another one of those. One of my old guitars was advertised on the internet – there was a letter signed by me, so it must have been one of mine! They were looking for $300,000 for it! It was a nice one, mind you, but I thought "Fucking hell... *how* much?"'

There has been talk of Gibson making a Mick Ralphs 'Collectors Choice' special edition Les Paul but the concept has been slightly hampered by Mick's current lack of vintage bursts. He even considered seeking out one of his old guitars to fulfil the brief. 'If you go onto the Les Paul Forum they know where each sunburst is and who owns it – although there's still a few they haven't accounted for.

'The last one I had was a very early 1960 with a '59 spec, before they went to the thin neck. It was kind of beaten-up and it had been refinished horribly, so I stripped it back to the wood. It was a lovely guitar, it sounded like a violin – absolute heaven, no matter what pickups were in it. I was swapping in newer humbuckers to see what happened, but nothing affected the tone. It's the quality of the wood really more than anything else... it's seasoned, and they had Brazilian rosewood fingerboards. I think I've still got the original PAFs in a drawer. I'd love to track it down.'

Indeed, Mick is something of a celebrity guitar tinkerer, and vintage dealers often believe they can tell when of his old guitars passes through their hands. 'I've got a terrible reputation,' he chuckles. 'I remember Rick Zsigmond from the Vintage Guitar Emporium saying "What's going on in the back of this guitar? There's Christmas tree wiring in there!" It was that green wire, all sellotaped together. I was trying to make it sound better. Whether it did or not...'

It's a recurring story, and people still approach Mick and say they've acquired one of his old guitars but that they had something of a shock when they looked inside. 'I just say, "Oh dear, well... it works, doesn't it?" When I was on tour in the '70s I used to buy old parts – capacitors, volume and tone pots, bridges, pegs, all the hardware. I'd buy a new Gibson, get it home, take the pickups out and put some old ones in to see if it made any difference. Sometimes it did, sometimes it didn't. I've still got loads of spares at home.'

Despite his devotion to Gibsons Ralphs went through something of a Strat renaissance at one stage with Bad Company – and he always made one specific

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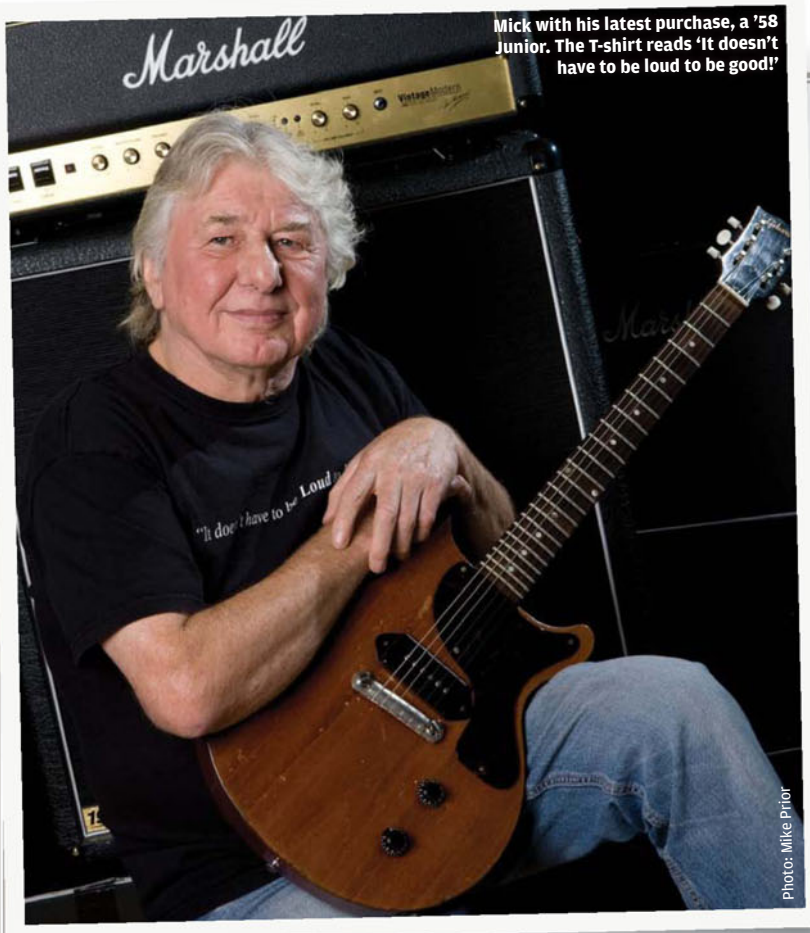

Mick with his latest purchase, a '58 Junior. The T-shirt reads 'It doesn't have to be loud to be good!'

modification. 'I had a particularly good Strat at one point – a black '63. It sounded like a Les Paul, it was that powerful. They're harder to play than Gibsons but I like them for certain things. They're a totally different animal. I never used the tremolo arm, I don't like 'em. If you break one string the rest go out of tune, so I'd wedge a piece of wood about the size of a clothespeg in the back up between the trem block and the body; then if you break a string, it stays in tune. I've still got all these old tremolo arms at home from all these Strats I've had... there's dozens of them!

'I've always treated my guitars pretty badly – you're the boss, you see, not them. You should look after them, but if you need to do something to make them work for you, then do it... and don't worry about it. I was in the studio once and wanted to play some slide on a track. I grabbed a Strat and rammed a pencil in under the strings and rolled it down the neck to the nut to raise the action, and it worked great.'

Mick insists vintage Fenders are as tough as old boots and will happily place his '57 Esquire on the floor and walk right across the body and neck to prove the point. 'Fenders aren't so precious. They're just two bits of wood bolted together, which I kind of like. That's the main difference between a Gibson and a Fender. They're so robust and the neck comes off the body straight out, while a Gibson's 17 degree headstock pitch make them much more fragile. I had a lovely reverse Firebird in the Mott days, and one day in the studio the strap went and it hit the ground and the headstock snapped right off. It was horrible!

'I've always treated my guitars pretty badly. You're the boss, you see, not them'

'It even happened with one of my Les Paul Historic reissues. I was polishing it, held it up to look at it and it shot out of my hands. It felt like slow motion. I could see it going, and then smash – the headstock went. I was so upset that I just sort of wedged all the bits of wood together and superglued it... and it held! It was a bit lumpy, but it worked fine. I used it for two or three years before I had it fixed properly.'

Vintage guitar fans can rest easy: these days Mick has pretty much hung up his soldering iron and will now shift a guitar on if doesn't sound right. He's been through a huge selection in his time, owning almost every kind of sought-after vintage Gibson and Fender.

'I bought a lot of them at decent prices, so I did amass quite a collection in the '70s. I had a lovely blond '59 335; I bought an original Flying V from Top Gear in Denmark Street for £600 with a case. It was a '58 and there were only 56 built that year. How much do they go for now? But of course back in the day we didn't know all that. I stopped once it got to silly money, because I like a bargain. I'm now of the belief that not all old guitars are great, and not all new guitars are crap. I meet these people who have these "holy grails" but they're scared to take them out, so what's the point? Instruments are meant to be played.'

The guitar that served on the recent Bad Company tours is a 2007 Custom Shop '58 Les Paul reissue found in Vintage & Rare on Denmark Street. 'I picked it up and I thought "This is light!" It turned out it was chambered, so it sort of sounds like a cross between an old Les Paul and a 335. It's got a lovely sweet tone. I've got a couple of others that don't sound as good.'

Recently Ralphs has dipped a toe back into the vintage market, and he stumbled over a good deal when Bad Company played in Chicago. 'I've been quite restrained over the last few years but the Chicago Music Exchange had a double-cut '58 Junior and an old Epiphone Coronet, so I did a deal for the two. They're still cheaper in America but I did feel a bit guilty about buying two... but then I thought, ah well, it's what I do. I thought I might give the Junior a whirl at the gigs in November because of its Mott association.'

Last time out in 2009 Mott The Hoople got rave reviews and this time they'll be playing the 02 Arena, the biggest gig the band have ever played. 'Selling out five nights at Hammersmith was very heartwarming. It was a long time since we'd played together so we were an unknown quantity, but the people that came loved it.

'We were never that accepted – we were underdogs and outsiders. We thought we'd failed, really, until *Dudes* came along. Now they say we were like a proto-punk band. People like Mick Jones, Johnny Marr and Noel Gallagher all say they love us, so I guess we must have been doing something right. It's just nice to be recognised after all this time.'

Mott The Hoople Play five dates across the country finishing at the 02 Area, London on 18 November. Go to www.aeglive.co.uk for details

Listen up

MOTT THE HOOPLE
All The Young Dudes (1972)
The breakthrough album, but the turning point for Ralphs. 'We'd survived on adversity and disappointment, but then we lost that wildness. It was time to move on.'

BAD COMPANY
Bad Company (1974)
Ralphs' songs found a home with one of the great supergroups of the '70s. *Can't Get Enough*, *Movin' On* and *Ready For Love* all featured, as did his 1957 Fender Esquire

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Photo FINISH

Inside one of the most spectacular guitar books you'll see – Lisa S Johnson's *108 Rock Star Guitars*. Interview by **Michael Stephens**

Les Paul's 1980 Heritage Les Paul Recording, with Bigsby

Jimmy Page's Gibson EDS-1275 doubleneck

Books about guitars are ten a penny, but *108 Rock Star Guitars* is something special. It's taken photographer/author Lisa S Johnson 17 years to complete, and these are not photos of just any guitars – these are photos of the special guitars of the famous, captured up-close.

Lisa Johnson used to work for Kodak in the 1990s, testing new film, but she also loved classic rock. She decided to bring her two passions together, and photographing guitars was her unique way of doing a corporate job.

From an early shot of Les Paul's favourite Gibson Les Paul – shot in black and white, then hand-tinted – the project gradually built up in to a book. *108 Rock Star Guitars* doesn't feature many shots of the stars themselves. It's all about their guitars.

'When I met Slash he said, "This idea is so cool,"' Johnson recalls. '"You just want to photograph my guitar, when everyone else wants to photograph me!" Slash thought the idea was awesome.'

Johnson's main challenge was getting access to the artists and their precious instruments, but she began to make headway, especially after the legendary Les Paul gave his personal blessing. She often worked on the fly, shooting backstage at concerts with few lights. As for cleaning the guitars up for the photo, that wasn't on the agenda. 'I wanted to document how these guitars really are,' she says. 'Chris Dreja from the Yardbirds' guitar is frankly a bit of a mess, but it's his guitar. And that's important.'

Billy Gibbons' fur-covered 1958 Gibson Explorer

And why, we must ask, did she photograph 108? It seems like a pretty specific number.

'I'm a yogi. One of the most significant numbers in yoga philosophy is 108 – it's a cosmic number, ' replies Johnson. 'The Indian culture has a prayer bead, a mala, which always has 108 beads. Even in Chinese medicine, there are 108 pressure points on the body.

'In numerology, you add up one, zero and eight and you get the number nine – which symbolise beginnings, endings and transformation. And within nine, you have three threes. The threes of body, mind and soul in Christianity – the father, son and holy spirit... and also the Hindi trinity of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer, and Shiva the destroyer and transformer.

'There are many other things about the number 108. Stonehenge is 108 metres in circumference. There are 108 suns between our Sun and the Earth, and there are 108 moons between the Sun and the Earth.

Ace Frehley's custom-built UFO Light guitar runs for about five minutes on a battery pack

That's all pretty intense! I didn't want a book that was 100, or 101. Everyone's used that. Part of my mission for the book was to spread the cosmic message about the number 108.'

Here Lisa Johnson talks us through pictures of just some of the legendary guitars in her book.

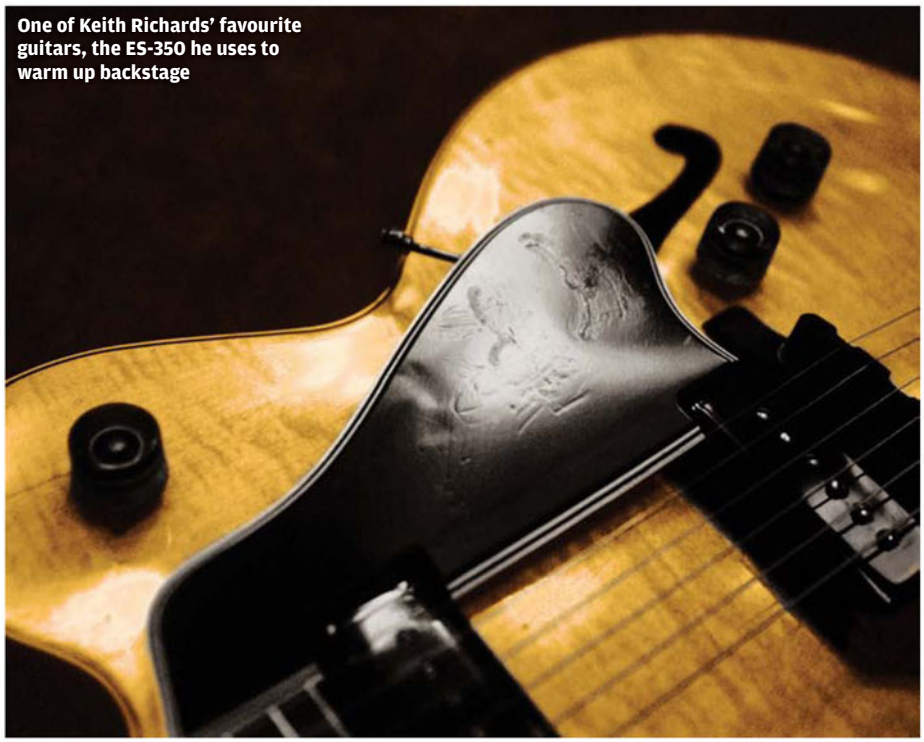
'Ace Frehley's UFO Light Les Paul is so unique. It sparkles, it lights up during the show, and that's fun. Kiss's guitars are out of control'

Les Paul
1980 Gibson Les Paul Recording model w/Bigsby – Les's Favourite Live Guitar

Lisa Johnson: 'Les was always very accessible. He played every Monday night at the Iridium, a small New York Broadway jazz club, and would always sign autographs and talk to the last person standing. Les was just that way with his fans, really incredible. I got to know him, and simply asked: can I photograph your guitar? He said, sure! I shot it in black and white, and then hand-coloured it. Whenever I'd see Les again, he'd say: there's that girl who does the guitar art! Such tender moments for me.'

Jimmy Page
1968 Gibson EDS-1275 Doubleneck

LJ: 'I asked whether I could photograph either Jimmy's Les Paul #1 and his violin bow [famously used on *Dazed And Confused*] or his EDS-1275 doubleneck. For my next book, I



One of Keith Richards' favourite guitars, the ES-350 he uses to warm up backstage

Joe Walsh's 1958 Gibson Les Paul Standard goldtop

hope to photograph the #1 Les Paul and the bow. I've never seen those two photographed together – to me, that would be such an iconic image of Jimmy Page's instruments.

'But opening up the case of the EDS-1275 and breathing in the history was amazing. The energy I felt, it made me tremble. To be able to hold it and see it up close was fantastic. What I love about this shot is the big long scratch down the centre of the pickguard. I've seen photos of the guitar many times, of course, but I'd never seen that captured.'

Billy Gibbons
1958 'The Fur' Gibson Explorer

LJ: 'Billy's guitar tech suggested that I shoot Pearly Gates [BFG's fabled 1959 Gibson Les Paul 'burst], but just about everyone has photographed it. So with ZZ Top's whole touring rack laid out in front me, I decided to pull out the fur Explorers instead. The difference between Billy's one and Dusty Hill's is interesting. Dusty sweats a lot, so the fur on his Explorer bass is all matted, while Billy's is in such good condition, it's like he's combed it out! This Gibson Explorer is actually serial number #0008. Number #8 off the line... and Billy puts fun-fur on it? Only ZZ Top can get away with doing that. Unique and funny, like ZZ Top's personality.'

Ace Frehley
'UFO Light' guitar, a custom-made Les Paul

LJ: 'Ace Frehley's Les Paul was one of the first shoots I did, on the first Kiss "final" tour. They were touring with Ted Nugent and Skid Row, with Kiss playing as the headliner. I was taken into a backstage room where his tech had four of Ace's guitars ready. But the "Light" Les Paul is so unique. It's a great showpiece. It sparkles, it lights up during the show, and that's fun. Kiss's guitars are out of control. All good instruments but both gimmicky and extra special. I photographed it with colour infrared film.'

'It was great to shoot Keith Richards' 1952 Gibson ES-350. You can see how the pickguard is completely gouged out by his skull ring'

Keith Richards
1952 Gibson ES-350

LJ: 'It was a huge vetting process to even get access to the Stones. Eventually it came via a friend of a friend who happens to know Keith's guitar tech. I finally got to make a call to the Stones' crew. Even Keith's tech wanted to know: where am I from? What music do I listen to? Finally they decided I was cool enough. But their reasoning was interesting. I'm Canadian by birth, and Charlie Watts' drum tech is Canadian... so they decided we Canadians should work together!

'So it was Charlie Watts' drum tech who helped me out. I showed up the day before a Stones show in Las Vegas, and I'm with Charlie's tech. He has Charlie's drumsticks, Stones guitar picks and all sorts. He said, "Keith and Ronnie have picked specific guitars to photograph, and they're ones that are rarely seen on stage. They're rare, they're vintage. They're the guitars Keith and Ronnie use to warm up backstage before the show."

'What a cool idea. They didn't want a shot of Keith's Teles or the Gibsons that he's famous for playing onstage, but something different. So it was great to shoot this. It's his 1952 Gibson ES-350 and you can see that the pickguard is completely gouged out by Keith's skull ring. These are the things fans never see, and this guitar is rarely documented. It was a nice gift from the Stones, that they would give me this treasure to photograph.' ↔

Slash's Les Paul, complete with cigarette burn

Joe Walsh
1958 Gibson Les Paul goldtop

LJ: 'I photographed the Les Paul that his wife, Marjorie, had given to Joe as a birthday present. Joe was great – he had his guitars brought out to my studio in Malibu. The first was this 1958 Gibson Les Paul goldtop. It's probably one of Joe's most valuable guitars... it must be worth $500,000.

'But three or four weeks later, his assistant called me and said, listen, there may be another guitar you want to photograph. So they brought over this guitar by Jay Black. Very odd, I'd never even seen one before. And that's also in the book.'

Slash
1987 Gibson Les Paul

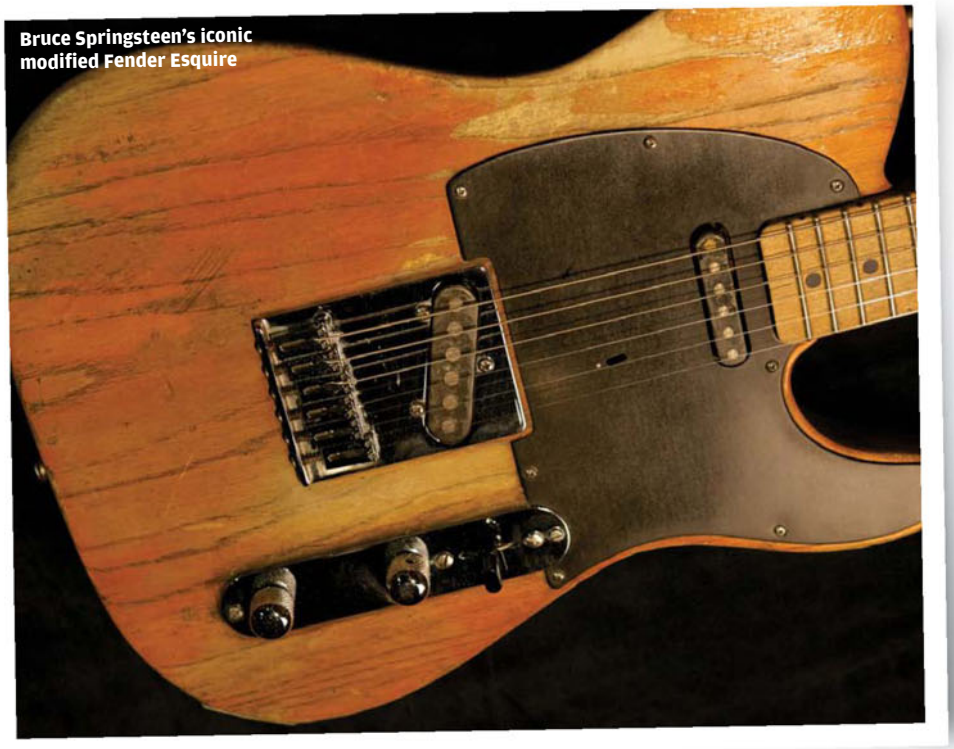
LJ: 'I met Slash when he was playing national anthems on a baseball field in Toronto – the Toronto Blue Jays versus the Boston Red Sox. He played both national anthems. I got to meet Slash and photograph the guitar he played. But later his tech Adam Day called and said: "That was a Les Paul that was flown in. Do you want to do the real one?" Of course! I went down to Vegas and photographed six or seven of Slash's guitars.

'The "one" is his 1987 Gibson Les Paul. Look at it! Adam Day told me about how Slash was playing with Alice Cooper one night, and Slash's cigarette fell out his mouth and landed on the lacquer... which held it on. Slash kept playing, but it burned a big hole. And that's what you see on that guitar.'

'Slash was playing with Alice Cooper and his cigarette fell out of his mouth on to the guitar and stuck there, and he just kept playing'

Bruce Springsteen
1953/'54 modified Fender Esquire/Tele

LJ: 'This was the last one, the 108th guitar I shot. It was on show at a Philadelphia exhibition about Bruce. The Esquire/Tele was on the wall in a case, but it was closing day, so once they'd dismantled the exhibition they brought Bruce's guitar down for me. It's a reject guitar, originally, from Fender... something didn't pass a quality test. But that makes it all the more interesting. It's the one on the cover of *Born To Run* and other Bruce albums. It's simply iconic. It's Bruce's favourite guitar – great instruments aren't always the most expensive or perfect. It's a road-worn piece of art, and it was an honour just to get that close to it.'


Bruce Springsteen's iconic modified Fender Esquire

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HOOKED ON CLASSICS

FAME AND FORTUNE

What once were secondhand guitars are now hallowed icons. **Phil Harris** recalls tales of star guitars he's known and owned over the years

It was great to read about Bernie Marsden's 1959 'Beast' Gibson Les Paul Standard in the November edition of *Guitar & Bass*. I have played the Beast quite a few times, and it is a wonderful example of a '59 'burst. What I can't vouch for is whether it is truly the one-time property of Eric Clapton, either from the Bluesbreakers period or his Cream days. I just don't know... and the provenance of guitars – certified as being owned by a famous name – is a notoriously tricky business. However, over the years, I've owned and seen many guitars with interesting histories... and here are a few.

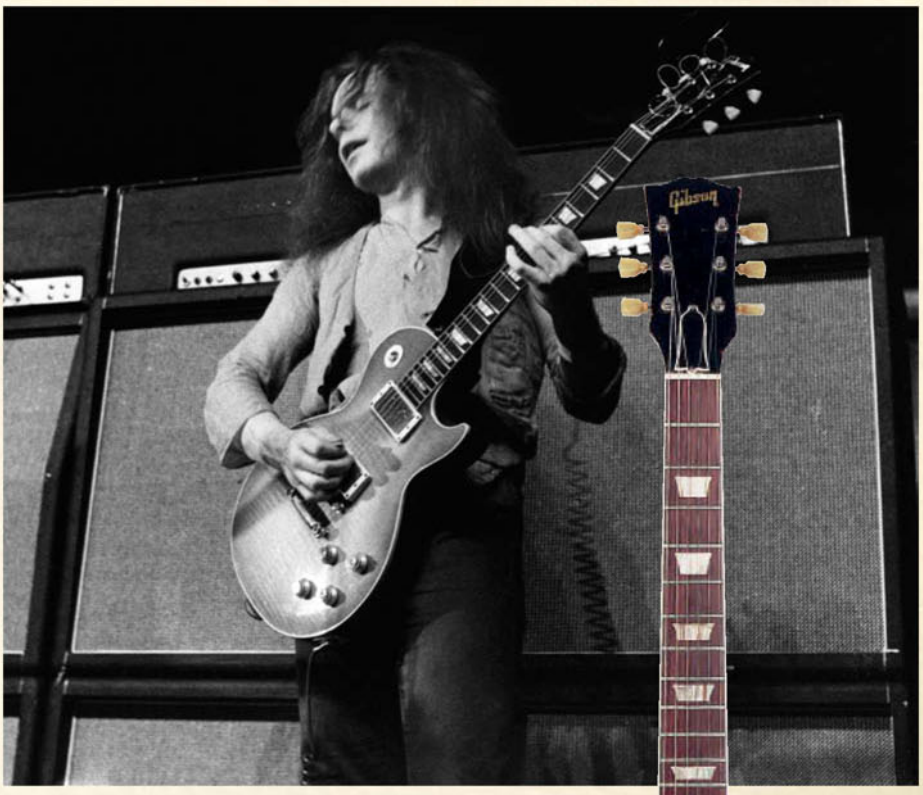


Photo: Nicky J Sims/Redferns/Getty

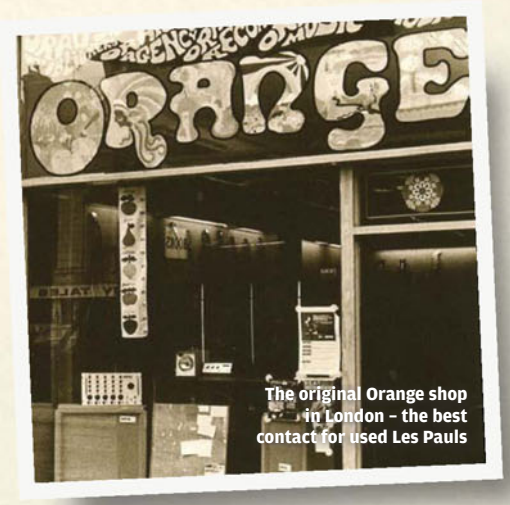
Eric Clapton/Paul Kossoff 1958 Gibson Les Paul sunburst

This is one Eric Clapton 'burst that I did own. It's the one that Eric traded with Paul Kossoff on Blind Faith's 1969 tour, when Free were the support act. But I didn't know that when I bought the guitar.

In 1976, at 21 years of age, I found myself in the possession of a really good Gibson Les Paul Standard. It was a light-fronted one, close in appearance to Peter Green's famous 'Greeny' which I now take care of. But back in 1976, I needed a spare. I never particularly wanted an 'ex-name' guitar, I just wanted a good one. Even then, vintage Les Pauls were never cheap; you'd pay £1000 to £1200, a phenomenal amount at the time. But I called the Orange shop in London, the place which had the most '58-'60 Gibson Les Paul Standards at the time. They knew a guitar player with one who played in a band called Syrup, but he didn't want to sell his. But a few days later they told me about a guy in East London who had bought a guitar from Paul Kossoff – a darker-finish Les Paul. Kossoff was a hero of mine, but I was interested simply because it looked like a great '58 Gibson Les Paul sunburst. I'd seen it in photographs when Paul was with Free.

The seller's name was Terry Newman. I was told he'd never sell it at first, but then it turned out that his wife was having a baby and he needed money, so he wanted to sell and get a cheaper guitar. In those days there was a brand of batteries called Power Pack, and his band was also called Power Pack.

The 'dark sunburst' ex-Kossoff '58 Les Paul



The original Orange shop in London – the best contact for used Les Pauls

Dave Murray with Iron Maiden, 1982: no qualms about adding humbuckers

Photo: Paul Natkin/WireImage/Getty

This Dave Murray signature model was based on his modified '50s Stratocaster which was originally owned by Paul Kossoff

Terry and his band used to cut off the labels off the batteries and stick them onto the guitars – good advertising! Terry had done things to the headstock, and the back of the neck had been re-finished, but there was nothing I couldn't reverse and make it the way I wanted it.

Terry was looking for a quick sale, and we agreed on £650. I only had £400 at the time, but I had an early '70s Les Paul Custom that I could add for the extra £250. He agreed, so he sold one Les Paul and got a good replacement, plus the cash he wanted The thing that later scared me was that he said he was contemplating cutting the body and adding a third humbucker into the '58 – so I got there just in time. All this took place within weeks of Paul Kossoff dying, incidentally, but that's not why I wanted it. Even though I was a huge Paul Kossoff fan, I just wanted a good backup Les Paul sunburst.

The ghost of Paul Kossoff

I took the Kossoff '58 sunburst over to see my friend Tommy Willis; he played with Chris Rea. Within minutes, it fell off its stand – probably a weedy stand, but we had no idea why the stand collapsed. I was convinced it was Paul Kossoff's ghost!

They were strange times. As great as the Les Paul was, I never really got into it; I always felt it wasn't 'mine'. It was only ever used as a spare, and the records I made with it... it sounded too good to be a spare.

I sold it to another Kossoff fanatic in late 1976. It didn't feel right, I felt like I'd nicked it off Paul Kossoff's ghost. But it came back to me again in 1980.

The weird thing was that this Kossoff fanatic was selling back to me the light-fronted sunburst I originally had. But by 1980 I had a really clean '59, so I decided to sell it. So, he sold the Kossoff Les Paul back to me. I didn't particularly want to keep the Kossoff Les Paul for a second time, as I was trading guitars by then.

So, what to do? I gave Free's Paul Rodgers a phone call, as I knew him through friends. So I sold it to Paul Rodgers. He was delighted, as it was one of Paul Kossoff's favourite guitars. And 20 years later, Paul Rodgers is back in touch with me. I never even knew this was the Les Paul that Eric Clapton had traded with Paul Kossoff. It was when Blind Faith toured the USA with Free as support; Clapton got Paul's 'Black Beauty' Les Paul Custom in return. But Paul Rodgers told me he wanted this particular Les Paul to help out David Kossoff – Koss's father – to sell for the Paul Kossoff Foundation. Next, I took it down to Eric Clapton's office in Chelsea. Eric was great. He examined it and verified that this '58 Les Paul was the one he traded with Kossoff when Free supported Blind Faith in the USA. Eric gave me a letter confirming it, so I sold it to Paul Rodgers, and then it went to Christie's for auction in 2000 for £47,000. It was sold to an anonymous American collector... and I've never heard of it since.

'The owner said he was contemplating cutting the body and adding a third pickup to Kossoff's Les Paul, so I got there just in time'

Paul Kossoff/Dave Murray white Fender Stratocaster

Here's another strange tale. The guy who re-sold me Kossoff's '58 Gibson Les Paul sunburst also part-exchanged another guitar with me at the time. It was Paul Kossoff's

Photo: Photoshot/Getty Images

The Rickenbacker 325 complete with typical Rose-Morris UK import f-hole

'If I did have proof, then this Lennon-owned Rickenbacker would be worth a million pounds. But I didn't get proof. I'm not bothered'

white Fender Stratocaster, the one pictured on the cover of Paul's *Back Street Crawler* album. I had that for a while, then sold it. The guy who bought it from me had sprayed it black and put a black '50s scratchplate on it, which was a bit daft.

But I bought it back and had it refinished. There was little interest in provenance at the time; I had to advertise it in *Melody Maker* to sell it... and the buyer was Dave Murray of Iron Maiden. And what did Dave do when he got this fabulous 1950s Fender Strat of Paul Kossoff's? He put two humbuckers in it. Poor old Strat! But Dave still has that guitar, and you can see it in many photos of early Iron Maiden.

John Lennon's Fireglo Rickenbacker 325

Provenance can also cause problems of its own. I own a Rickenbacker 325 of John Lennon's. I bought it at auction after Ringo Starr sold Tittenhurst Park, the house he bought from Lennon. This was in 1985... but I didn't even take the auctioning guy's name. I still own that Rickenbacker today, but I have no proof it was John Lennon's. It's a Fireglo Rickenbacker 325 that John was given by Rose-Morris [shop/distributor] when Lennon damaged one of his Jetglo Rickenbackers. I have photos of John with this guitar, but sadly they're not detailed enough to really see the grain of the wood to be able to 'prove' it's the same.

Some Beatles buffs say I'm wrong, but I saw this very same guitar when I was at Tittenhurst Park in 1978 when a friend of mine was recording there, and I remember seeing this very guitar. Ringo Starr later did an interview saying he had the guitar. Maybe he has? Maybe there are two of them? But I know what I've got, and it is John Lennon's 1960s Fireglo Rickenbacker 325 that I saw at Tittenhurst Park in 1978. However, as I say, I have no proof. If I did have proof, then this John Lennon-owned Rickenbacker 325 would be worth a million pounds. But I didn't get proof... and I'm not bothered. It's a nice guitar, anyway!

Star associations

Provenance is always hard in the vintage market. Besides, you can't always just sell anyway. I own Mark Knopfler's National, the one that's on the cover of *Brothers In Arms*. It's in secure storage. That might be worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, but Mark may want it back someday.

The market is always changing. When I first owned the '58 Clapton/Kossoff Gibson Les Paul and showed it to people, there was no real monetary interest merely because had been owned by someone famous... it was just a good guitar. You can't always find interest just because of a name. I've had a couple of guitars owned by Cliff Richard – and I had trouble even giving them away.

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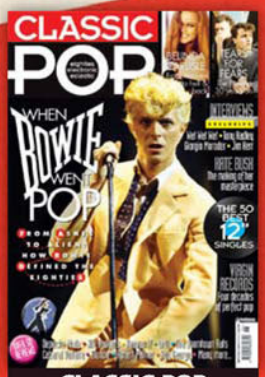

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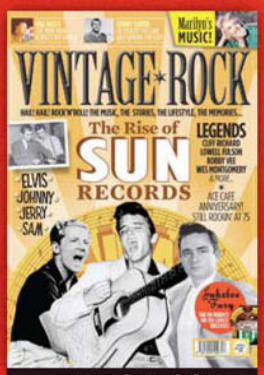

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Major SWING

As one of the UK's hardest-working session players, Andy Mackenzie is a master on all types of fretted instruments and has something that will sound the part for every occasion. Lars Mullen hears his story

From jingles to tours to TV dates to recording sessions to weddings and parties, Andy McKenzie has done it all – and made a living at it, too. His true musical passion, however, is jazz, especially gypsy jazz, following in the footsteps of the great Django Reinhardt; he plays in a busy gypsy jazz band, writes articles on the subject, and has just recorded a selection of Django tunes for the Penelope Cruz film *Head In The Clouds*. He started early, his father being a jazz guitarist, but as a boy growing up in the '60s, Andy's initial guitar inspiration was somewhat more pop-based.

'I grew up seeing the Beatles on the TV, and I came from the "I want that red Strat in the guitar shop window!" era,' he explains. 'My dad could see how much I wanted to be a guitarist, but he was a jazz player, so when I was 14 – the age at which most of the kids at that time were learning songs by the Beatles or the Rolling Stones – he bought me a Rosetti Lucky 7, a semi-acoustic archtop guitar which he felt was the closest at the time to an expensive jazz guitar. I now can see that he knew I had the gift, and after flying through piano lessons and getting the grades, he wanted me to go down the jazz road.

'I seemed to handle the chords pretty quickly after listening to jazz players such as Barney Kessel. Not long afterwards my dad said there was an opening for a guitarist in the band, and if I got it together pretty quickly I could have the gig. Needless to say, I learnt all the jazz chops and filled the slot!

'The Lucky 7 did really well for many years in the jazz band until in 1972 dad bought me a secondhand Gibson ES-330, which he was wise enough to

Left, a mid-'60s Gibson 330, owned for 42 years; right, a 1949 Gibson Super 400

recognise as a jazz guitar underneath the skin, as it had a completely hollow body without a centre block. I used it along with a Fender Bassman and that was my rig all the way through my teens, playing all sorts from jazz and also backing American blues artists during the '90s. The 330 is a real working man's guitar and they're still very popular with blues players today. It's a great player, and I still use it a lot for session work.

'I used to have a lot of semi-acoustic guitars but I've narrowed them down to the essential ones for when I get the call for that style and sound. A favourite is a gorgeous 1949 Gibson Super 400... I've gigged and recorded so much with this one. I bought it in New York about 20 years ago, and I've fitted a DeArmond Swingmaster pickup for when the need arises to go electric. The joke is that they call this one the "austerity" model as it was built after the war, when they had shortages of ebony to make bridges and fingerboards, so they had to "make do" with Brazilian rosewood. Breaks your heart, doesn't it.... ha!

'Thinking back, learning how to play charts and scores really paid off. I've always loved intricate guitar parts and fingerpicking, especially classical and flamenco styles. But the guy who really does it for me is Django Reinhardt. Django influenced so many players, from Barney Kessel to Jeff Beck. Some of the solos he was playing in the 1930s were so far ahead of their time. I have a personal obsession about trying to work out how someone like that could walk on the stage of a packed 2,000-seat hall and entertain with an acoustic guitar and no amp!

'Django, of course, played a Selmer Maccaferri guitar – and that's it, full stop. If you want to sound like Hendrix, you play a Strat; if you want to sound like Django, you play a Selmer-style guitar.

'Original Selmers have spruce tops and laminated rosewood backs and sides. The originals can sell for tens of thousands of pounds, but there are a few guys who know what makes a really good gypsy jazz guitar.

'One example is Maurice Dupont. I have one, built from solid Brazilian rosewood with a spruce top. This guitar is 10 years old now and it's been played to within an inch of its life. It's very loud, and it's been wonderful to hear the sound mature with age.

'Typically for Selmer-style guitars, this one is very light and vibrant, with a highly stressed top. It's strung with a fairly light set of strings, and when at concert pitch the long scale produces that big, sharp, cutting sound.'

Top left in the group photo above is a nylon-strung Selmer-style model built by Scottish luthier Rob Aylward in Aberlour, Banffshire. 'It's got the "alternative" traditional woods – a cypress body and a sitka spruce top,' says Andy. 'It's a fabulous handbuilt Maccaferri-influenced model.

'Top centre is the Maurice Dupont, and top right is a Gitane, built in China; it's my own signature model, with the same spec as the Dupont. It's superb, very loud, and fitted with a D-Tar pickup system. Far left on the bottom row is an Italian Eko which dates from the ➔

Andy with his much-played Maurice Dupont

Ovation Balladeer and Jamon Zeiler flamenco guitar

'Bob Benedetto is at the top of the tree. I feel he's one of the greatest living archtop builders'

early '70s. I bought it for old time's sake as I used to lust after this model in the famous Bell guitar catalogue as a youngster!

'The smaller instruments in the front row are a ukulele modelled to look like a Macafferri tenor guitar and a mandolin, but made by the late Dave Hodson, an English luthier who really understood the gypsy jazz guitar. In 2005 Dave also built me this hybrid electro-acoustic fitted with a Bill Lawrence pickup which you can see in the front row on the right. It's a prototype thinline model and it sounds superb both acoustically and hooked up. It has the real Django vibe, with some essence of a large archtop jazz guitar thrown in as well.

'I met up with US guitarist John Jorgenson in France a few years ago and we were obsessing about Django and talking about the fact that all over the world his style had become cool again with a lot of electric players who were maybe looking for a new direction. John had been approached by a film company to play the role of Django in the film *Head In The Clouds*, so we transcribed all the original material between us and I'm happy to say that I appeared – very briefly – in the film, with my hair greased back and dyed black! I actually sold my original Selmer that I used in the film to John Jorgenson.

'There's a lot to be said for the volume these guitars produce. The tight, vibrant construction plays a major part, and silver-plated copper strings give the authentic gypsy jazz sound. The bridges are also hollow so they act almost like another sound chamber, so that's another part of the equation. I remember seeing Fapy Lafertin, a top gypsy jazz player from Belgium, and his band Waso at a jazz club in Manchester. I can remember the owner asking if the band wanted a lift in with the PA, and they said they didn't have one. He asked how the audience were going to hear them, and Lafertin just said "They'll have to shut up and listen!" That was one of the best concerts I've been to!

'The story goes that when Mario Maccaferri left Selmer around 1934 he took his "D" soundhole design with him. Selmer carried on with their own smaller soundholes and 14-fret necks, which Django preferred, as they were more of a solo instrument. The D-holes – known in France as *grande bouche*, or big mouth – are better for rhythm as they have more of a midrange bark, while the oval hole, *petit bouche* or little mouth, is the louder one.'

Andy, perhaps slightly surprisingly, has an Ovation Balladeer. 'It was a 21st birthday present and I fitted a DeArmond pickup and set it up with flatwound strings and used it as a jazz guitar for years,' he explains. 'It just worked out that way.

'I also have a nylon-strung flamenco guitar custom-built by the US luthier Jamon Zeiler. It found its way onto eBay and didn't get any ➔

Two Collings guitars, a CJSB and a D2HA

Left, a Recording King RD16; right, Andy's Martin D-28

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Goldtone banjitar and an antique Bacon & Day Silver Bell

A 50th Anniversary Les Paul (headstock right) and a Suhr Classic

bids, so I got it for a song. The retail price runs into thousands, but I've become friends with Jamon and I've honoured it by ordering another one and giving him credits on my albums. It's a killer guitar with a spruce top and a stunning maple body, and it's fitted with an LR Baggs system. It's wonderful for classical session work, and I used it on the album *Home Brew* by Gadjojazz.

'Completely at the top of the tree for me for custom guitar building has to be Bob Benedetto. I feel he's one of the world's greatest living archtop builders. I met him in New York when I was working with a lot of American jazz musicians including the legendary Bucky Pizzarelli, and he offered to build me whatever I wanted. So I asked for a Custom seven-string like Bucky played, made with maple, spruce and ebony, with a Kent Armstrong pickup. I use the Van Eps tuning where the seventh string is a low A, with a set of 14-80 La Bella strings; the third, fourth, fifth and sixth strings are black nylon tapewounds for a more mellow output in the midrange. I had to wait six months for completion, and Bob insisted I played it at the Benedetto endorser's concert when I picked it up. I'd never played a seven-string before, so in the meantime, I asked British builder Brian Eastwood to build me one so I could rehearse for the show.'

'When I buy a new guitar, acoustic or electric, I wait for it to tell me what gauge strings it wants'

Andy regards his high quality flat-tops as his rent-paying models. 'As a session player, the big strummers really come into their own for acoustic blues, bluegrass and folk. This sunburst Collings CJSB doffs its cap to a slope-shouldered Gibson design, but it has its own sound and a balanced tone to die for. It sounds stunning hooked up via an LR Baggs Anthem pickup system. I liked this one so much I've purchased a D2HA dreadnought with a natural finish Adirondack spruce top, so between the two I have everything I could wish for.

'The Collings guitars took pride of place while my very tired Martin D-28 was semi-retired for a neck set and a new bridge by UK luthier Peter Barton, but now the work's been done it's back in pole position. This guitar has been played so much... it's done everything. I've been recording recently with this guitar with the Sarah Smith Trio, using just a Neumann mic and a Neve preamp, and it's the sound that everyone wants – it's stunning. I defy anyone to get a better acoustic sound!

'The Recording King RD16 is modelled on a prewar Martin, with forward-shifted bracing. It's very affordable and a great substitute if I don't want to take the Martin out.

'Every time I've bought new guitars, be it acoustic or electric, I wait for the guitar to more or less tell me what gauge strings it wants and what style it ↔

Squier '51 and a modded Fender Telecaster

Partscaster with a Tele neck and a Vintage VS850

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1970s Columbus, a Gordy fretless and a Yamaha five-string

'Most of my recent buys have been with my ears. To be honest, all I really need is a Martin D-28 and a good Tele'

wants me to play it in. Some, like the D-28 or the Collings, ask for 13 gauge to excite them. Then again the Super 400 sounds really dull with flatwounds, but explodes into life with big bronze strings.'

Andy has another skill on top of guitar and mandolin – he can double on banjo. 'There's a big bluegrass movement here in the UK, and I need a lot of percussive fretted instruments,' he explains. ' My 1926 Bacon & Day Silver Bell four-string banjo has actually earned me more revenue than any of the other instruments here. I'll use the electric six-string Goldtone 750 if I need to, but I've done more gigs than I can remember with the Silver Bell.'

For harder rock sounds Andy has some cool solidbodied electrics. 'I bought a limited edition 50th Anniversary Les Paul for my own 50th birthday. It retailed around $7,000, but I managed to get an amazing deal! The spec is quite high with all-gold hardware, goldplated pickguard and headstock, light alloy tailpiece, Burst Buckers, special resistors and pots, all-mahogany construction and an ebony fingerboard... it all adds up to a fairly special Les Paul. I actually bought it as an under-the-bed keepsake but I gigged it the day it arrived and thought it was the best Les Paul I've ever played, so it's been a working guitar ever since. I recently used it for the electric guitar parts on the new album by Gwyn Evans, also known as Dr Jazz.

'In contrast, this dark green Strat is a retired "bitsacaster" which I've had forever... I've changed the parts so many times. It's now fitted with a Squier Tele neck. Somehow I managed to demagnetise the pickups, so I thought it was time I bought a decent Strat for solid electric work, so I picked up this really nice Suhr from Tone World in Manchester, finished in a light shade of sea foam green and with an HSS pickup configuration. I've done a lot of gigs with this one now and I love it to death... it totally responds to what I put into to it. The mechanics just work perfectly, and there still hasn't been any need for adjustment of any kind from the day I bought it.

'I liked the look of the Squier '51 the day it was launched, and it's regarded as a really underrated guitar by a lot of players. I bought this one on eBay, but took it apart and re-assembled it as I didn't feel it was put together that well. Now it's excellent – it really plays and sounds good, and it's turned out to be a fine second-in-line to the Suhr.

'The red Tele is also built from parts, but it's a good working guitar. The body is original but it has a chunky Allparts neck, and I've fitted a humbucker. I can get all the sounds I need from this guitar, including country, blues, jazz or rock. I've also had the body hollowed out under the scratchplate.

'Aesthetics come into play for me, although most of my recent acquisitions have been based on using my ears and what I feel I can sonically coax out of the guitar. During the '80s I was working with a Frank Sinatra tribute act and they got uppity because I was using a dayglo pink heavy metal shredding guitar, even though I could make it sound like a big band jazz guitar for the part!

'To be honest, all I would probably need is a Martin D-28 and a good Tele – I can make both of those sound like most other guitars. Still, I was recently looking for a visual guitar for some up and coming showbiz gigs – though maybe not a dayglo shredder this time! – and I saw this very affordable Vintage VS850WH big bodied semi (which does a fine job. The maple body works a treat with the Wilkinson Alnico double coil pickups. All the hardware is good quality and it looks great in white, with added essence of Gretsch.

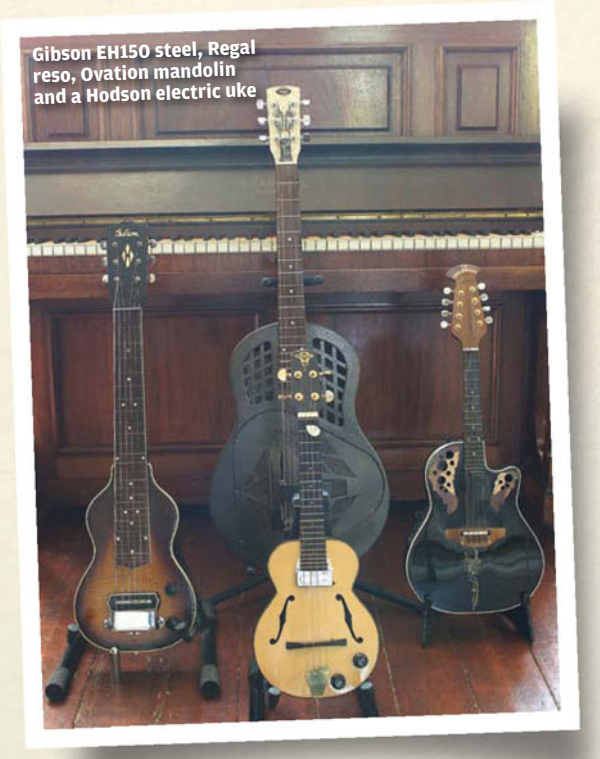
'I'm not a bass player but I need one or two in case I get the call to stand in for someone or do some recording. These three have proven their worth many times. My old Columbus Jazz Bass copy is something I've had since about '72 and it's still a favourite, a great player and the one I generally take along with me if anyone wants me for a bass session. I inherited the Gordy headless fretless model along with the Yamaha five-string.

'There are a number of oddballs that also come in very useful when the occasion arises: for resonator sounds I have this Regal Tricone, while the electric four-string ukulele is another of Dave Hodson's creations. This cute eight-string Ovation electric mandolin is one which John Jorgenson used when he was working with Elton John. This has been with me now for many years, so I can say it's 99.99% mine now!

'I've not had much need for a lap steel, but this is a beautiful example to have to hand. It's a 1936 Gibson EH150 with a Charlie Christian pickup – this was the first electric model that the company ever produced.

'I'm more than happy with my guitars right now. Like a lot of players I went through an early stage when I collected for the sake of it, and ended up with far too many, but when I started to earn money as a session player I realised I only really needed the essentials. I now regard them as a collection of tools. It's a bit like having an old joiner's tool bag, with everything inside there for sentimental reasons – but they're all working guitars.'

For more information on Andy Mackenzie visit www.andymackenzie.com



Gibson EH150 steel, Regal reso, Ovation mandolin and a Hodson electric uke

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Pivotal Influence

We explain how to improve your playing using the 'pivot' note method

This month we're looking at a 'pivot' method that makes an excellent coordination exercise for the fretting hand (it also sounds very effective musically). The idea of the pivot technique is that the notes of a melody are constantly alternated with a fixed note – once you've tried it, you'll understand exactly how it works. The pivot note can be at the top of the phrase, at the bottom or even in the middle. In the following exercises, however, the pivot note is always at the top.

This pivot technique is common in classical music and can also be heard in many classical guitar pieces, such as JS Bach's *Prelude in E Major* from his fourth lute suite and Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Prelude Number 3 in A Minor*. Neo-classical heavy metal shredder Yngwie Malmsteen is also rather fond of pivot licks, but try not to let that put you off. Next month, we'll have another couple of excellent pivot licks and I'll provide a nice chord progression you can use to join them together.

1 PIVOTING AROUND THE 12TH FRET

4/4 TIME

This exercise starts with the pivot note – the top string at the 12th fret – fingered with the pinky. This note is returned to every second note, alternating with a descending then ascending chromatic series of notes on the top string (chromatic, of course, means moving one fret at a time).

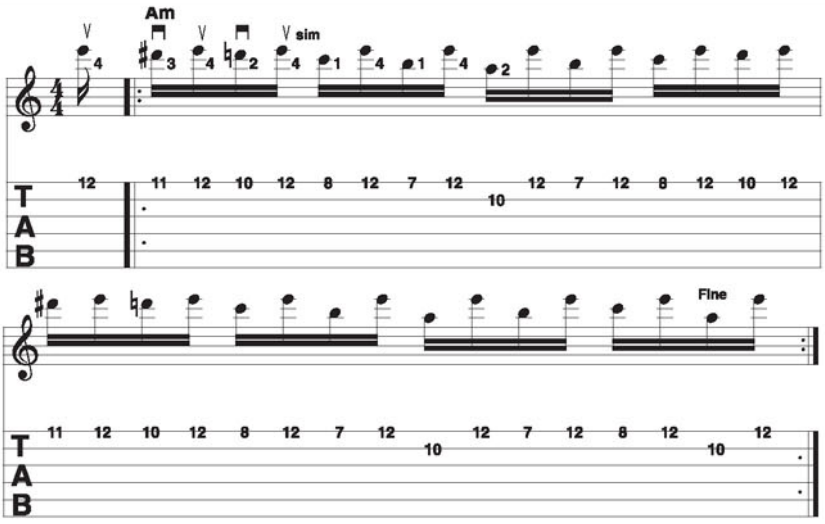
Try to keep the fingers of the fretting hand spread out one-finger-per-fret. Placement of the thumb is important, and since this exercise involves one-finger-per-fret fingering with a bit of stretching with the fretting hand's index finger, the blues-style position of wrapping the thumb over the back of the fretboard is distinctly inappropriate. Everyone's hand and fingers are slightly different, but in general for this exercise keep the thumb roughly in the middle of the fretboard and roughly behind the first finger – that is, behind the ninth fret. Correct placement of the thumb will enable you to play this exercise with no hand movement. The fretting hand fingers to use are indicated beside the appropriate note head in the music notation; use the same fingers to fret the notes on the way up as on the way down. The picking is strict alternate picking, starting with an upstroke. If in doubt, check the picking indications above the note heads. Try to keep the fingers poised above the fretboard as closely as possible so the fingers have as short a distance to travel when they're needed; this general rule will help you play faster, and will lessen the chance of making a mistake since the finger is moving less distance, minimising the required effort. Practice slowly and accurately, then gradually build up speed. It's a good idea to practice to a metronome to encourage you to play the exercise exactly in time and then as a measure of your progress as you gradually increase the speed.

2 PIVOTING IN A MINOR

4/4 TIME

This second exercise is actually a pivot lick in the key of A minor. Like Exercise 1, it starts with the top string played at the 12th fret with the pinky, but this time the non-pivot notes consist of D#, D, C, B and A – the first four notes of the A natural minor scale plus the sharpened fourth degree of the scale, which adds some pretty cool-sounding chromaticism at the top of the lick. Basically, the lick works down these notes, then back up, then back down, then up the first three notes of the scale pattern (A, B and C) and ends on the lowest note of A on the second string at the 10th fret. The lick is written with a repeat sign, meaning that it's supposed to be played continuously in a loop. When finishing, stop at the 'Fine' indication on the second last note of the second full bar.

As in Exercise 1, the fingering is generally one-finger-per-fret, although again the first finger has a bit of a stretch to cope with, in this case reaching down to the seventh fret. Again, try your best to keep the thumb roughly in the middle of the neck and more or less behind the ninth fret (note: unlike in the previous exercise, though, the ninth fret note is not played). The main thing is not to be tempted to move the fretting hand.



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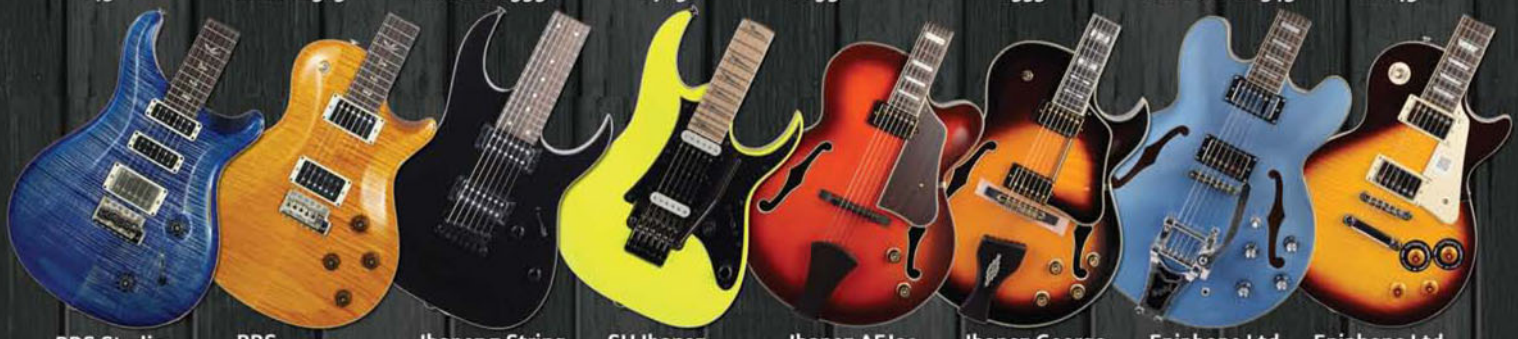

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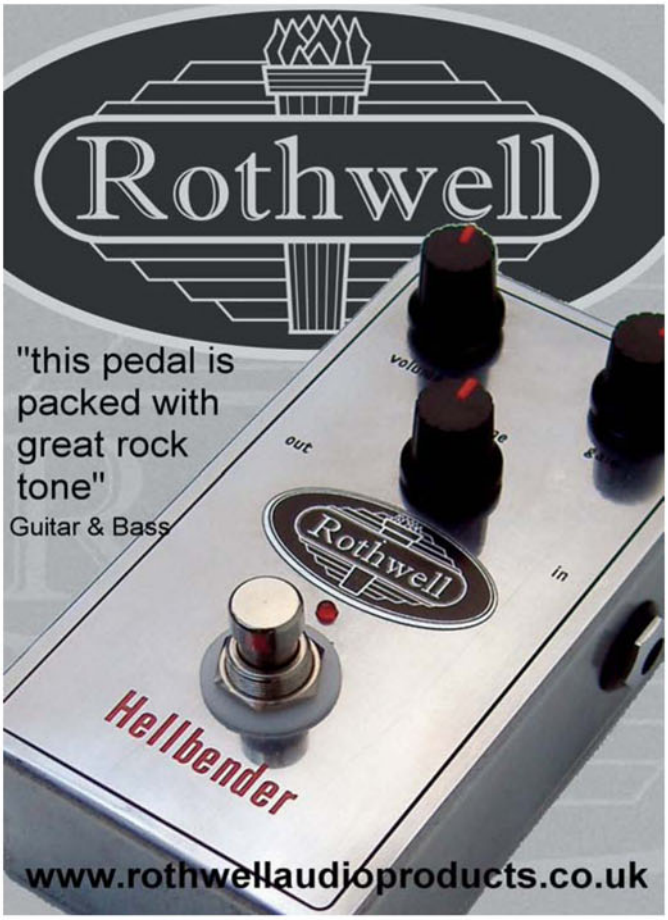

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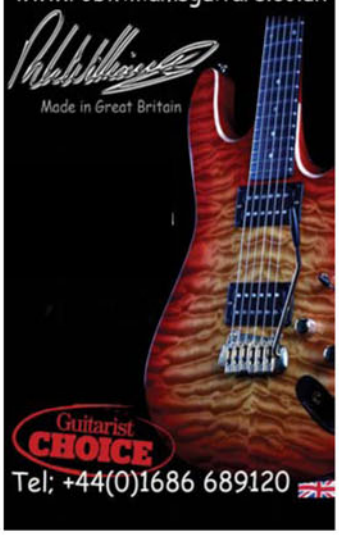

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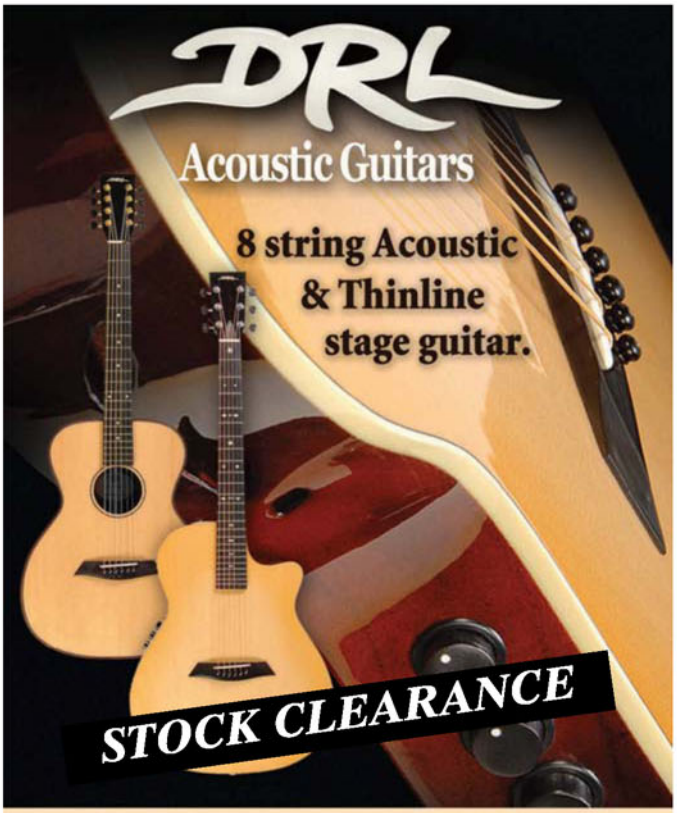

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Fender Precision Nate Mendel bass guitar with slim neck and Seymour Duncan pickups, as new condition. Comes with Hiscox hard case. Tel: Chas 01622 754648, Kent area

Fender Stratocaster three-ply tortoiseshell scratchplate, pre-wired with 3 Seymour Duncan stacked STK-S1 single coil-sized white covered humbuckers and controls, £85. Tel: Colin 07732 947131, Epsom

Gibson Les Paul Studio, early model, faded polaris white with dot board, DiMarzios fitted, £580. 1998 Flying V 40th Anniversary (not 58 replica), mahogany with gold hardware, £1100. Tel: 0777 327 6815

Fender Clapton Stratocaster 1990 in rare Candy Apple Green, owned from new. Tweed case, all original tags and candy. Possible p/ex or £850 ono. Tel: Brian 07904 184047

Yamaha SA700, two for sale, Japanese-made early 1980s ES-335 clone, both excellent condition, cherry £675, blonde £695. Tel: John 01992 523138 or email johnblackman@ntlworld.com, Essex

Gibson Les Paul custom Alpine White right-handed guitar, 2012, hardly used, genuine reason for sale, £2200 ono. Tel: Nigel 07928 256305 or email nige142@hotmail.co.uk

Spector/Kramer NS-2 bass, 1987 USA handmade, amber, flame maple, EMGs, Hazlab preamp, crown inlays, ohsc, near mint condition, £1950. Tel: 01483 751929, Surrey

Laney Lionheart 20W 4x10" combo, near mint with cover and footswitch, £420, p/x considered. Tel: Richard 01233 712169 or email richardthe professor@yahoo.co.uk, Kent

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Gibson Les Paul '58 reissue, VOS, Iced Tea, great figured top, chambered, A+ condition. Custom Shop case, COA and candy. Tel: 07977 010499. For details and hi-res images email: farmyard49@btinternet.com

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Marshall cabinet, 100W, 4x12" speakers, £160 ono. Email: mark.fletcher007@hotmail.com

Fender Bassman piggyback blonde '63/'64 blackface Setzer model, Mojotone pine cabs 2x12", £1250. Tel: Richard 01364 643455 or email dodgemsrock androll@hotmail.com Devon

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Gibson Les Paul Standard 2007, tobaccoburst, '60s neck, inc case, £1400. Fender USA Strat 2005, black, inc. case, £650. Tel: Steve 07891 894947 or email watts9jj@btinternet.com

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Soundtrack of my life

John Petrucci

Dream Theater

From blues rock to jazz fusion to classic rock to deep prog to metal, the Dream Theater guitarist reveals the records that rearranged his synapses forever

An alumni of the prestigious Boston Berklee College Of Music along with Dream Theater bandmates bassist John Myung and drummer Mike Portnoy, John Petrucci is one of the most technically gifted guitarists of his generation. His band have flown the flag for modern progressive rock since their inception in 1986, and over 11 albums they have risen to become one of the biggest metal bands on the planet. Petrucci is also a regular on Joe Satriani's G3 tours, having appeared no less than six times. Their latest work is a self-titled album which Petrucci sees as a symbolic statement that Dream Theater are still pushing forwards. It's a towering tour de force that fulfils its brief of representing everything that has been special about this band over the years.

Al Di Meola

CASINO

Technically I was getting better and better on guitar and this one friend heard me play and said 'Man, you've got to listen to Al Di Meola.' I tried to learn every note and it had a real impact on my technique, especially my right-hand picking. To be able to play in that style gives you a lot of control and power.

Rush

HEMISPHERES

I love the whole Rush catalogue, but I remember playing this over and over... so much so, it really sank into my subconscious. It was challenging musically, and it was different. It had a harder edge than some of the other stuff I was listening to, and Alex Lifeson's influence as a guitar player was huge.

Yes

CLOSE TO THE EDGE

This made me look at music a little bit differently. The longer song formats with all the different members interspersing their sections of music was a revelation. Yes embodied the whole spirit of progressive music – stylistic changes within songs, long solos, beautiful harmonies... it had a huge effect on me.

The Who

WHO'S NEXT

Pete Townshend and his whole attitude, style, and strength made a big impression. There's just so many classic songs on this, and they're all special and unique. I loved the contrast between that simple, raw rock quality and the fine songwriting – you could always just pick up an acoustic and strum along.

Pink Floyd

THE WALL

This goes deep into that whole thing about story-telling through rock music. Everybody would like to do things on this scale. It's awe-inspiring, and all amidst the backdrop of some incredible songs. Gilmour is such an expressive player. The solo in *Comfortably Numb* is one of the greatest of all time.

Led Zeppelin

II

Growing up in suburban New York, I heard Led Zeppelin on the radio all the time – if you could play the solo on *Heartbreaker,* you were the king! Creating that kind of signature riff is so hard to do. I love the way Page creates different textures with acoustics, mandolins and 12-strings. He was a master at that.

Stevie Ray Vaughan

COULDN'T STAND THE WEATHER

For some reason, Stevie Ray playing a Hendrix song – *Voodoo Chile* – just jumped up at me out of the radio. I felt as if he had literally stepped into the room. This record pulled me into that whole gutsy blues-rock thing. That kind of style become infused into what I do as a player, and I just love this album.

Metallica

MASTER OF PUPPETS

One of those turning point albums where you hear a sound and a style and it's like getting hit on the head with a baseball bat. I still reference this album, I still worship James Hetfield's guitar sound and I even use the same amps that he used. Those tight, percussive, syncopated rhythms, plus all that power... it's huge.

Van Halen

VAN HALEN

Eddie Van Halen changed everything. The song *I'm The One* stands out. I couldn't comprehend how that could be a guitar. It was rock party music but with tremendous, innovative and electrifying technique – you were literally hearing things for the first time. He had the absolute holy grail of guitar tone, too.

Location: Coffee Barker, Cardiff Photo by Amy Davies www.amydavies.com

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